

Bodies over borders: Trans-sizing the expatriate experience

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Abstract

This thesis introduces the concept of *trans-sizing* to explore the discursive, embodied and relational experiences of expatriate women in Singapore, and the multiple ways that body size and migration experiences intersect within different spaces in the city. The thesis is based on empirical research with women living in Singapore who identified themselves as expatriates. The focus of this study is upon the ways that experiences of body size shape narrations of migration. I explore this relationship through discursive constructions, embodied and emotional experiences and relational encounters. I argue that body size is spatially contingent and significant to the way that identity, difference and migration are imagined and narrated within the city. Furthermore, I argue that narrations of body size are constructed through gendered, medicalised, classed and racialised discourses that divide women from different places.

The study explores the multiple ways that experiences of body size and migration intersect in social and cultural spaces within Singapore. I situate this research in the intersections of geographical work on migration and the interdisciplinary field of Fat Studies. In so doing, I highlight the centrality of body size as an axis of identity that is inherently geographical (Longhurst, 2005). Drawing on an in-depth analysis of 45 individual interviews and one focus group, the study values the words and experiences of expatriate women, providing a nuanced and innovative approach to explorations of migration, gender and body size. By developing the concept of trans-sizing, this research responds to the need for cross-cultural approaches to critical work on body size (Cooper, 2009), the gendered nature of expatriate migration (Fechter and Walsh, 2012), and embodied studies of transnationalism (Dunn, 2010), and contributes to the growing body of work that explores body size from a critical and spatial perspective (Colls and Evans, 2009).

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Chapter One: Introduction

It's interesting because how you feel about your body can apply to different areas: home country, current home and then Asia, because it's a little bit different here. You know because it's not like I've come to another Western country. Like I haven't come to The States for example where I would be going around saying "God I feel so skinny". Obviously society and how things are have an influence. (Hayley, 30, UK¹)

Rich (1986, p. 212) suggests that we should begin, 'not with a continent or a country or a house, but with the geography closest in – the body'. It is from here that I begin; not in Asia or Singapore or at home, but with bodies – with bodies that move. I start with bodies because 'this is how we live our lives – through places, through the body' (Nast and Pile, 1998, p. 1). In this thesis, I focus on a particular type of embodiment – how body size shapes people's experiences with places and how this in turn comes to be embodied. Specifically, I focus on the experiences of women expatriates in Singapore. In starting with bodies that move I bring together work on transnational migration with that of critical studies of body size. I seek to *trans-size* – to recognise body size as central to experiences of places, and places as central to those of body size. By *trans-sizing* I place the body as significant to migration experiences and call attention to the multiple ways that body size experiences can highlight different social and cultural relations in places. By *trans-sizing* I focus on transnationalism and the importance of moving bodies to experiences of size; how cross-cultural and transnational approaches to bodies can open up the potential to illuminate sized experiences, by accounting for the multiplicity of ways that bodies and places intersect with social, cultural, embodied, political and material relations across borders. Ultimately, I argue that place and migration matters to body size because, as Hayley reminds us, "society and how things are have an influence".

By *trans-sizing* I take sized bodies as my starting point and explore the multiple ways that people and places intersect. As Rich (1986) suggests, it is essential to recognise bodies as important so we can see how bodies (and their size), shape and are shaped by their intersections with social, cultural, historical and political relations in place, and how these become embodied. In exploring bodies, and by this I mean sized, gendered, raced and classed bodies, we can acknowledge that there is no one body,

¹ Hayley is one of the research participants from this project. Throughout the thesis, quotes from the women I spoke with are followed by a pseudonym, their age and their country of nationality.

there are only *bodies* – bodies that are continually undergoing a process of inscription, in and within places (Cream, 1995a; Longhurst, 1995). However, central to my approach is recognition that while bodies are continually ‘constituted by culture’ (Bordo, 2003, p. 142), there is also a ‘weighty materiality’ to them (Grosz, 1994, p. 21). I take an embodied approach, one that is attentive to both the discursive construction *and* materiality of bodies, and their contextualisation spatially. Finally, I focus specifically on the experiences of expatriate women who have moved to Singapore to understand why, as Hayley suggests, it is “a little bit different here”.

By focusing on bodies that move over borders, specifically sized bodies – the tall, short, fat, thin, flabby, tight, wobbly, muscular, plump, svelte, swollen, and all those in-between, I seek to unite work that demonstrates the relations that surround fatness and the ways that borders – be they national, bodily or other – play a part in how we experience places. Indeed for many people, how they experience different places is bound to understandings of how bodies *should* be, i.e. what it means to be fat or thin in different places and at different times. As such, just as the colour of your skin or the gender you perform is important to experiences of places and vice-versa, so too is the size of your body. By focusing on the intersections of expatriate transnational migration in Singapore, with body size experiences, I explore how body size *matters* within narratives of migration. It is my argument that body size is a significant marker of identity through which people experience socio-spatial relations and construct their sense of personal identity. Additionally, I contend that the sized experiences of migrants have rarely gained academic attention, and as such provide new and exciting ways through which to explore transnational experiences. When we move over borders (I do not mean just national ones), we can experience our identities in new ways. Significant to this is often our gender, class and ethnicity. However, few geographical studies have recognised body size overtly as important to this. This research implicates body size as a central aspect of transnational experiences in the same way that scholars have recognised gender or ethnicity to be so (Mahler and Pessar, 2001; Boyle, 2002; Pessar and Mahler, 2003; Yeoh *et al.*, 2003). Therefore, it is the aim of this thesis to explore how body size is experienced and what it means and what happens when (sized) bodies move over borders.

In order to explore how sized experiences are (re)constructed through expatriate migration I ground this research within feminist theoretical work on embodiment (McDowell, 1992; Cresswell, 1999; Simonsen, 2013; Longhurst and Johnston, 2014). Embodiment provides a framework through which to explore how people live their lives

through the body, and how this is temporally and contextually contingent. Embodiment has enabled feminist academics to deconstruct masculinist binaries of knowledge production (Rose, 1993a), and make room for understanding the ways that gender is lived in and through material and discursive bodies (Longhurst and Johnston, 2014). Embodiment captures the ways people live through their bodies in different places and through encounters with others. As we move over national borders, embodiment can ground migration experiences within the everyday; within the messy materiality of bodies – the ambivalent, mundane and dynamic. Feminist contributions to work on embodiment provide a means through which to explore, not only the place of structural forces within migration, but the multiple ways subjects are made through movements (Silvey, 2004). As Gorman-Murray (2009, p. 444) suggests, migration is an intently embodied process, ‘Migrants are not “disembodied actors”; sensual corporeality, intimate relationality and other facets of emotional embodiment also suffuse relocation processes’. As women move transnationally they experience their migration through relational encounters with and through their bodies and also the bodies of *others*. Therefore, geographies that are attentive to embodiment provide multiple ways through which to explore migration. As such it is from here – from bodies – that I begin.

This introduction consists of four parts providing an overview of the research, its aims and approach. To start, I explore work on body size and why it is important. Second, I clarify the use of some terms that are used throughout this thesis and highlight my critical engagement with them. Third, I contextualise this research within Singapore and explain why Singapore was chosen as a field site. Finally, I give a brief overview of this study, the methodology adopted, research questions and an overview of each individual chapter.

1.1 The sized body

Many societies within the West today are in the grip of concerns regarding the *obesity epidemic* (Boero, 2007b).² In the UK, where I live, there is a proliferation of popular and medical ‘knowledge’ that suggests that fatness is not only undesirable and unattractive, but unhealthy and dangerous. For many people, these discourses have significant implications to how they experience their own bodies. For example, you may have wished to lose weight and attended a diet group, or followed a diet, you may know

² I return to this term later on in the introduction.

your BMI or even your waist-to-hip ratio,³ you may have stood on the scales on a Monday morning and wished quietly to yourself for the number to decrease – I know that I have. In short, for many of us – body size matters.

What is clear is that the pervasiveness of (anti)obesity discourses means that they permeate many aspects of people's lives and shape and construct how we think about, feel and experience our body size. Body size discourses are not equal, shaping people's experiences unevenly at different times and in different places, intersecting with various aspects of our identities. However, although body size may shape a large part of people's experiences of themselves, it is fair to say that body size has not been a large part of geographic work on identity until relatively recently. Informed by feminist, queer and disability studies, the growing interdisciplinary field of Fat Studies provides a theoretical and practical home through which critical studies of body size may unite – challenging the dominant demonisation of fatness by valuing and making space (both figuratively and literally) for bodies of different sizes (Rothblum and Solovay, 2009). By *trans*-sizing I highlight not only the significance of transnational relations to body size, but acknowledge the intersections between Fat Studies and queer politics (LeBesco, 2004; Cooper, 2012; Lloyd, 2013). In so doing, I look to expand understandings of how fatness is lived and experienced beyond homogenous normative accounts, focusing on the ways that transnational sized experiences could challenge Western bodily ideals and the structures and practices which cement ideas regarding body size and identity (Binnie, 2004; Manalansan IV, 2006). In chapter four, I review the literature on Fat Studies and critical geographies of body size specifically, however in this section I wish to introduce some of the ideas that have informed it and shaped this research project. It is my argument that through migration body size is experienced differently than within expatriate women's home countries, as body size intersects with varying socio-cultural relations in places and between different bodies. An embodied perspective that is both attentive to, and critical of body size, provides an innovative way through which to position the gendered experiences of women's migration.

I situate this research within the intersections of critical geographies of body size and Fat Studies as a commitment to critiquing and challenging the ways that bodies are thought about and experienced in different places and at different times. I do so by exploring how medicalised and popular discourses inform how people think about body

³ BMI or Body Mass Index is derived from a person's weight and height and is used by many medical professionals and lay populations to work out what a person's 'healthy weight' should be. The value places a person on a graph ranging from underweight, normal, overweight and obese.

size and how in turn this comes to be embodied and lived. In opposition to medicalised discourses that predominantly discuss fatness through monolithic narratives of fatness as bad and unhealthy (Colls and Evans, 2008; LeBesco, 2010; McPhail *et al.*, 2011), I seek to illuminate accounts of fat subjectivities, focusing on the range of ways body size shapes people's lives in different places (Cooper, 2010; Monaghan, 2010). Indeed, using such a framework enables me to explore the wider implications of medicalised approaches to body size that perpetuate the Cartesian separation of mind and body, and the labelling of different bodies as deviant and bad, and others as normal and therefore acceptable (Evans, 2006). As a geographer, I seek to 'write body size *geographically*' (Longhurst, 2005, p. 247, emphasis in original), exploring the intersections of body size to gender, sexuality, nationality, race and ethnicity, colonialism and culture, in different places and when people move transnationally. In the case of this research, I focus on women who have moved to Singapore from a variety of countries but predominantly those that are considered 'Western'. It is the aim of this thesis therefore to explore the implications to body size as bodies move over borders, specifically to Singapore.

So far I have spoken about bodies in different ways. I have discussed fatness and thinness, I have used the term body size and I have also discussed obesity. Body size is a slippery term, which can mean fatness and thinness but can also mean stature; it can additionally be used to discuss muscle mass or lack thereof. Furthermore, it can be about proportionality – where fat is on the body (Longhurst, 2001). For the purpose of this research, I use the term body size interchangeably with fatness. It should be noted that in most instances, unless highlighted, I am referring to the relations surrounding fatness specifically. However, at times I am also discussing height and stature, which is important to the analysis I present here. As I have suggested elsewhere, I use the term body size and fatness in recognition that,

fatness or being 'fat' is experienced, narrated and understood differently by different people, within different cultural contexts and at different times. In discussing fatness I hope to demonstrate the flexible and fluid nature of body size which involves not only the materiality of the physical body but also the intersections of bodily subjectivities with material, discursive and psychological spaces (Lloyd, 2013, p. 124)

Therefore, throughout this project I explore the 'messy materialities' (Ruth and Hassard, 2001, p. 3), discursive constructions, and entanglements with history, geography and culture of sized bodies (Longhurst, 2001). I explore what happens when bodies move

over borders – be they social, cultural, political or national – and how this affects experiences of migration. To do so I unite work on body size, with that of migration through a specific focus on expatriate women and their encounters in Singapore. Before doing so, it is important to question the use of a few terms that are repeated throughout this thesis.

1.2 Asian/Western expatriate/local

Throughout this thesis I will be using several terms, which, due to their problematic nature, require some critical reflection before proceeding. The quote from Hayley at the start of this chapter typifies how many terms were used by my participants throughout. As such, for simplicity I will be using many of these terms as my participants have done, for example: expatriates, Asian, the West, Asia and local. I will briefly discuss these now.

1.2.1 Expatriates

The term expatriate is often used to define – although not unproblematically – a skilled migrant from the West living overseas for a short period of time. While several terms are used to define these migrants within academic work, such as ‘transnational elites’ (Beverstock, 2002, p. 525), ‘highly skilled migrants’ (Findlay *et al.*, 1996, p. 49), and in the case of Singapore – ‘foreign talent’ (Ho, 2006, p. 388), these terms can be seen to relate primarily to economic migrants and are not very relevant to the everyday lives of the people I interviewed. For the majority of the people I spoke with, the term most acknowledged among migrants themselves was the word expatriate (or expat). Throughout this thesis I use the term, as my participants have done, to define the group of women I spoke with. There are clear reasons for the use of this term that I cover briefly here.

All of the women I spoke with defined themselves as an expatriate.⁴ The word expatriate originates from the Latin meaning, ‘out of one’s native country’ (etymonline.com, 2015, p. Online). However, despite this etymology the term expatriate is not used to define all people that are out of their native countries, for example domestic workers, who are often called immigrants. It is clear that there are assumed distinct differences between migrants, where expatriate is often used to categorise people from a particular class (middle) and racial (white) background. However, it is

⁴ Self-identification with the term expatriate was a prerequisite for participating in the research, see chapter two.

important to acknowledge that there are a variety of class variations within the category of expatriate – expatriates are not a homogenous group – which can help us to challenge the idea of expatriate as a racialised category (Fechter and Walsh, 2010). Importantly, within postcolonial settings like Singapore, the term expatriate will often be associated with particular historical, cultural and social contexts that are significant to the ways that people experience their identities. Within Singapore, there are clear links between contemporary versions of expatriate identities and historical imaginings of colonial societies. As such, what it means to be defined as an expatriate is contingent on a person's nationality, class, gender and ethnicity, shaped through historical and contemporary relations. While many of the women I spoke with contested the stereotype of expatriate women, this terminology still provided them with a means to situate themselves within a particular community and separate themselves from other migrant groups.⁵ Although the term expatriate is often saturated with postcolonial baggage, it still helps people to define themselves as different from other groups of people, and this was often the case in Singapore. I explore further in chapter two the recruitment process and the participants I spoke with.

1.2.2 The West and Westerners

Less contested than expatriate was 'Westerner' and 'the West', which for many seemed to be a logical and less loaded means through which to define themselves, yet still enabled them to be seen as different from the local population of 'Asians'. As Hayley highlights (p. 11), the geopolitical categories of Western and Asian were mobilised regularly by the women I spoke with as though they were natural. However, this is not the case and it is important before proceeding to highlight the constructed nature of these terms as they are historical, social and cultural. As Bonnett (2003, p. 332) suggests:

The contemporary idea of the West refers to far more than a geographical entity. It is a social, political and ethnic designation designed to evoke those values, practices and people that are, in other contexts, described as one or all of the following: democratic, capitalist, free, modern, developed, Christian, white.

Therefore, using the terms the West and Western evokes particular ideas and

⁵ Often associated with wealth, luxurious lifestyles and non-working women that stay at home having manicures and brunches.

understandings of what it means to be Western. Within the context of colonial discourses its use can be seen to produce distinctive and polarising discourses regarding Asian colonies and its Western colonisers (Bonnett, 2003). It is clear then, that while the West may not have an identifiable geographical boundary, it is saturated with meanings to the point that often no explanation is required in what is meant by this term. Throughout the interviews the West was often used in opposition to Asia, and Westerners to define a group of (predominately white) people that were considered distinct culturally, socially and visually from Asians.⁶

1.2.3 Asia and Asians

In the context of Singapore, Western was regularly mobilised to define a group of people – often non-white European or Americans. As Bonnett (2004) suggests, the term Western gains most cultural currency when it is used in opposition to those that are non-Western. Indeed, as Hayley shows, it is common to think of Asia as ‘other’ to the West, it is familiar and easily imagined. However, given the continent of Asia’s size and the countries and cultures that it encompasses, it seems ludicrous to define Asia and Asians by these homogenising terms. Yet throughout the interviews, Asian rarely required definition or clarification. As I highlight throughout the analysis, Asia and Asian were often used to separate the women I spoke with from those they considered to be different from, and it is clear that these terms carried significant social and cultural weight to them. Indeed, both the women I spoke with and myself understood who they were talking about (or not talking about) when Asian was used to define particular people or characteristics.

Furthermore, it is important to consider Asia, not as a homogenous construct of Western imagination, but to understand and appreciate the multiplicity of Asia’s own history and transcultural origins (Bonnett, 2006). While for many (including the people I spoke with) ‘Asia’ may seem like a logical way to define and categorise that which exists in opposition to Europe and the West, as Bonnett (2006) argues, this overlooks its own historical and cultural origins. Indeed, the construction of Asia and Asian as geopolitical categories is also not one-sided. While orientalism provides a useful framework through which to explore Western constructions of Asia, Asian and Asian values have also been mobilised by Asian leaders as a means through which to serve their own interests and strengthen a shared sense of identity (Thompson, 2001). As

⁶ I use visually here to suggest the range of embodied markers of difference (such as skin colour and body size) that the women used to determine if someone was Asian or not.

Mahbubani (1998) suggests, Asian values are often predicated upon what the West is not. Thus, *Asianness* can be seen to invoke particular characteristics that are seen to be the foundation through which Asian identities are constructed, even as these identities shift and change in relation to economic, political and social developments. Asia and the idea of who is Asian remains persistent. The term has entered into popular lexicon and is used uncritically to separate a place, its people and values as distinct from those within Europe, the West or the occident.

Throughout this research the women I spoke with used the terms Asian and local as a common-sense way to define people and practices that were different from them. There was a mutual understanding between us of what was meant when Asian was used and who this included and excluded. It was clear that Asian was predominately used as a racial category focused on non-white people. However, as I highlight in the analysis chapters, this did not necessarily include all people from an Asian country. In regards to discussions regarding women and body size, it was clear that many of the women were discussing Chinese Singaporeans as opposed to Malay or Indian people, or indeed anyone that visually looked Asian based on stereotypical assumptions. Critically, I wish to highlight the flexibility of these terms and highlight their problematic nature. I use them with caution.

Throughout the thesis I refer at several points to dominant Western and homogenous ideas regarding body size and fatness. By this I refer to the dominance of anti-fat rhetoric in several Western countries where thinness is revered and fatness is often conflated with being unhealthy and carries negative moral assumptions (Popenoe, 2004; Evans, 2010). I suggest throughout that these dominant discourses shape, and are shaped by, both contemporary popular and medical ideas regarding bodies, where there is limited room for diversity in sizes, and a large amount of pressure to discipline people (often women) to be thin or be seen to actively be pursuing thinness (Bordo, 2003; LeBesco, 2004). In particular, by suggesting that these discourses are homogenous I highlight the totalising nature of them, providing limited room for challenging ideas regarding the obesity epidemic or variations in the size of people's bodies (Gard, 2010; Monaghan *et al.*, 2010; Rich, 2012). In both critical and medical work on obesity, there is a shared sense that in contemporary Western countries there is a preference for thinness, but also that the obesity epidemic (even if challenged) is a Western phenomenon (Gard and Wright, 2005). I recognise that there are variations in cultural ideas regarding fatness in and between countries, and do not wish to homogenise ideas regarding body size. However, I believe that there are persistent and often unchallenged

ideas regarding fatness in many countries that has to a large extent shaped how fatness is seen and lived. Within critical work on this the focus has been on Western countries, but predominantly the UK and US (Cooper, 2009). By discussing these discourses as Western, boundaries are often drawn between Western and Asian in ways through which Asian ideas regarding the body are often linked to ‘primitive’ ways of knowing. For example, the assumption that cultures that celebrate fatness must in some way be primitive (Bordo, 2003). While I use the terms Western and the West throughout, I acknowledge that this involves dichotomous constructions associated with self/other, Western/Asian, modern/primitive and healthy/unhealthy. In much of the literature regarding body size (both critical and medical) the West is used unproblematically. In contrast, I wish to highlight throughout the constructed nature of these terms and how – through trans-sizing – we can unpack how they shape dominant moralised approaches to body size when people move, questioning the dominance of Anglo-American work in this area. While I do use the West and Western to talk about ideas regarding fatness, I am not uncritical of their use and remain mindful of their constructed nature, and how these terms shape ideas regarding fatness in different contexts – most specifically transnationally. When referring throughout to these discourses I acknowledge the problematic nature of ‘Western discourses’, but wish to highlight that for many of the women I spoke with, it was clear that these ideas regarding bodies had significant implications to how they lived and experienced their size. As such, when discussing the discursive construction of size, or predominant ideas regarding it, I am reflecting upon the way women talked about size with an awareness of where these ideas are coming from, and do so in order to deconstruct and challenge them.

For the purpose of this project and ease of reading, I will be using these terms as my participants have done. However, I do wish to highlight my awareness of the origins of their use – that they are socially and historically constructed. The use of Asian and Western throughout are hinged on imagined geographies of what Asian means and in direct opposition to what it means to be Western. Therefore, while I challenge common sense ideas regarding Asia and what it means to be Western, and acknowledge their constructed nature, they are used throughout to highlight the ways through which my participants negotiated, constructed and embodied their own sense of identities – through relational encounters with imagined Asian others. For the remainder of this

thesis, many contested terms are used without inverted commas, or once on their initial use and then without throughout the rest of the thesis.⁷

In the following section I provide a brief context and justification for Singapore as the location of research.

1.3 Singapore

So far I have situated this research within theoretical work on embodiment. I have outlined the significance of body size discourse and engaged critically with some of the language that is used throughout this thesis. This leaves us with the question then – why Singapore? Ultimately, Singapore is an excellent site within which to explore transnational experiences because it is a hub of mobility. While there are several reasons that meant that Singapore was both theoretically and practically suitable for this research, I focus here explicitly on three: Singapore's colonial background, as a hub of mobility, and as a place within which to critique the gendered nature of women's migration. I focus on these reasons in turn.

Singapore is an independent city-state located north of the equator at the southernmost tip of the Malay Peninsula. It is separated from Malaysia by the Straits of Johor in the north, and from Indonesia's Riau Islands by the Singapore Strait in the south. As figure 1.1 shows, Singapore is barely visible on most maps of the region due to its small size of only 718.3 sq. km, and is regularly referred to as the 'little red dot' (Singstat.gov, 2015). Based on the 2010 census, the estimated population of Singapore in 2014 was 5,469,724, 70% of which were recognised as Singaporean residents, either citizens or those with permanent resident status (Singstat.gov, 2015). Of the 30% non-resident population about 7.6% are acknowledged to be high-skilled workers and their dependants (spouses and children). It is this 7.6% that are most often referred to as expatriates as opposed to the majority of non-resident workers that are considered immigrants – such as foreign domestic workers and lower-skilled or semi-skilled workers. Although 30% of the Singaporean population can be recognised as immigrants, there are clear divisions between groups, firstly based on the visa status that they are entitled to, and subsequently the social and cultural divisions that may arise from these groups' experiences of the city. As it has been suggested elsewhere (Fechter,

⁷ Throughout this thesis certain terms that are often accompanied with inverted commas (to highlight their socially constructed nature) may appear without them. I have done so for ease of reading and because I believe that by using inverted commas for some terms but not others suggests that only certain words are constructed. Please assume invisible quotes are present if necessary.

2010), contemporary expatriate relations must be understood within the context of Singapore's colonial history.

Singapore is a relatively young country. It became an independent republic in 1965 after receiving self-governing status from Britain in 1959. It spent the years in between as part of the Malaysian Federation (Perry *et al.*, 1997). From its establishment as a British trading post by Stanford Raffles in 1819, its colonial legacy has shaped much of Singapore's contemporary form today. Rapid economic growth and large immigration resulted in the establishment of districts (kampongs) on the premise of separating different racial groups, and can be seen to be responsible for its conception as a multiracial city. It is still possible today to witness the original urban planning and separation of groups of people on the basis of their race, for example in Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam. While the European colonial population only accounted for a small minority of the Singaporean population (2% in 1880), they could be seen to afford superior rights and privileges both financially and socially (Perry *et al.*, 1997).



Figure 1.1: Location of Singapore in south-Asian region

Since its independence, it has been the goal of its founders to develop Singapore into a 'global city' (Rajaratnam, 1972). Sassen (1991, p. 38) defines global cities as 'cities that are strategic sites in the global economy' (p. 38), typified by 'the growth of networked cross-border dynamics' (p. 31). Regardless of whether these definitions are helpful or capture what a global city is, it is clear that within Singapore movements, flows and migration have been fundamental to the production of the city today (Oswin and Yeoh, 2010). As Yeoh and Chang (2001, p. 1026) state, in Singapore there is a 'high premium on the fluidity, mobility and connectivity in the global city, hence warranting attention not only to local powers and imperatives, but also how they articulate with forces and flows emanating from the outside'. It is clear that global flows and practices constitute a large part of the economic landscape but also social, cultural and political interactions. As a place within which to explore migration, Singapore offers a kaleidoscope of daily interactions within different places and at different times in the city. Singapore's colonial past and its rapid transformation into a leading global power makes an excellent site within which to explore post-colonial relations in a city where encounters with difference are regularly experienced.

The second reason for identifying Singapore as a field site is to contribute to a growing body of literature exploring women's experiences of migration (Yeoh *et al.*, 2000; Huang and Yeoh, 2003; Salih, 2003; McDowell, 2013; Hoang and Yeoh, 2014). There is a body of work that has explored migrant relations within Singapore from a gendered perspective, specifically focused on 'lower-skilled' migration, for example domestic workers (Huang and Yeoh, 1996; Yeoh and Huang, 1998; Momsen, 1999; Yeoh and Huang, 1999b; Yeoh and Huang, 1999a; Yeoh and Huang, 2000; Huang and Yeoh, 2003; Yeoh *et al.*, 2004; Kitiarsa, 2008). This work has challenged and critiqued the gendered nature of migration experiences within Singapore. However, less attention has focused, both in work on Singapore and elsewhere, on expatriate experiences of migration (Willis *et al.*, 2002). While economic studies have explored highly-skilled migration within paid employment such as the finance sector (Salt, 1988; Beaverstock, 2002; Beaverstock, 2011), this has often been limited to men's experiences where women's roles have been present often only as *trailing spouses* (Kofman and Raghuram, 2005; Colic-Peisker, 2010; van Bochove and Engbersen, 2015).⁸ Feminist geographic work has urged us to take note of the gendered aspects of migration (Willis and Yeoh, 2000a), and while embodied experiences are being recognised within this

⁸ Trailing spouse is a gender-neutral (although predominantly used to refer to wives) term used to define spouses that follow their partners (considered the lead migrant) because of economic employment.

(see special issue by Dunn, 2010), expatriate women's experiences have received limited interest beyond their role in 'emotion work' (Walsh, 2007, p. 511). Therefore, a gap exists within academic work on how women experience migration from a range of perspectives, such as 'privileged' migration, which is grounded within everyday embodied experiences.⁹ Singapore, as a hub of migration at a range of levels (long and short term, skilled and unskilled), is an excellent location within which to explore women's expatriate experiences, contributing to growing work on migrant lives from a gendered perspective, and attending to the gaps in literature on embodied expatriate experiences. I argue, that in order to critique and engage with postcolonial narratives of Singapore it is essential that we account for a range of voices, contributing to a rich and developed discussion of different people's lives within the postcolonial city. In the following section I provide a summary of the key aspects of this research.

1.4 Thesis overview

The objective of this research is to explore the embodied and emotional experiences of expatriate women living in Singapore through a focus on body size, and the ways that these experiences are shaped by everyday encounters. This research unites work on migration with studies of critical work on body size through empirical qualitative research. In so doing, it is the aim of this research to explore how body size experiences are spatially contingent, discursively produced and relational. In particular, body size experiences provide a nuanced and innovative approach to exploring gendered migration.

The structure of this thesis is slightly unconventional in that it does not proceed with a literature review chapter. Instead, each empirical chapter (chapters two, three and four) start with a literature review at the beginning before proceeding with the analysis. The reasons for this are to highlight the close relationship between theory and the empirical data, allowing me to show throughout this research's contribution to on-going work and connection to literature. Furthermore, it should be noted that all three empirical chapters are closely related but highlight the different scales and literatures that are applicable to the empirical data. Inevitably, there is crossover between these chapters highlighting the messy, complex and overlapping ways that migration and

⁹ Expatriate migrants are often referred to within studies as privileged migrants due to their financial privilege in relation to other migrants. However, this privilege is questionable if explored from a gendered perspective.

embodiment shape experiences. In this section I highlight the research questions, methodology and thesis outline.

1.4.1 Research questions

In order to explore experiences of migration as narrated by expatriates I developed three research questions. These questions have allowed me to explore the intersections of migration with critical work on body size, and ground this project within discursive, material and imagined experiences of migration in Singapore. The research questions are:

- 1) In what ways does expatriate migration shape social and cultural experiences and narrations of body size and vice-versa?
- 2) To what extent do cross-cultural expatriate narrations of body size draw upon discourses regarding obesity, health and racial difference?
- 3) In what ways are body size discourses embodied through encounters with *others*?

1.4.2 Methodology

This research project is based on empirical qualitative research that was carried out over a period of six months in Singapore between September 2012 and March 2013. The research methodology and analysis are informed by feminist research approaches to grounded, embodied experiences. While the research focuses mainly on the use of in-depth interviews, a focus group and the self as ethnographic focus have helped inform this project.

This project involved research with one self-defining participant group: expatriate women in Singapore. Chapter two outlines in detail the sampling method for this group and the recruitment of them. All of the research was carried out in Singapore; this has helped me to focus on experiences in situ and in the context of my own experiences of migration. I have tried where possible to allow my own voice to be present within the research process to highlight the inherently subjective and embodied nature of this research.

1.4.3 Thesis outline

Chapter two outlines the methodological background for this study. In this chapter, I outline the research design; specifically, I focus on the research background paying particular reference to feminist methodological theories. Insights are gleaned from the research itself and research perspectives are provided. The chapter focuses on three key themes: the theoretical contributions of feminist qualitative work and Fat Studies, the practicalities of researching body size, and the importance of reflexivity and positionality within this project. Its central contribution is to the gap in literature on methodological and ethical aspects of researching body size.

Chapter three begins with a review of literature on the discursive construction of bodies, paying specific attention to work on geographies of health and the medical gaze. Using a Foucauldian framework, this chapter explores the significance of medicalisation and governmentality to everyday spaces and lives by analysing how these discourses are significant to shaping and (re)producing expatriate women's experiences of body size in Singapore. The key focus of this chapter is on the ways that expatriate women talk about their experiences of size, drawing heavily on dominant discourses regarding women's sized bodies. I argue that anti-obesity discourses are central to the ways that women talk about and narrate their experiences of size, that are significantly shaped by gendered and racialised narratives of migration. This chapter contributes greatly to critical work on body size, highlighting the gendered nature of size and importance of moving beyond Anglo-American perspectives.

Chapter four provides a critical review of work on bodies and body size through engagements with literature within Fat Studies and critical geographies of body size. It then presents trans-sizing as an approach to uniting work on migration with that of embodiment. Using empirical data, personal narratives reveal how fat embodiment was lived, narrated and felt within Singapore. Specifically, this chapter explores the embodied experiences of sized bodies through critical focus on clothes shopping, emotional size and experiences of resilience. While chapter three explores the ways that body size is talked about, in this chapter I focus on the embodied experiences of size, recognising how everyday places and practices within Singapore shaped women's emotional encounters. I highlight how body size is an important axis of identity that shapes people's experiences of places and the importance of qualitative approaches within the geography to recognising the multiple and varied ways that people experience transnational migration.

Chapter five discusses how encounters of difference shape embodied experiences of size, gender, ethnicity and sexuality. It begins with a review of literature on encounters within postcolonial contexts, drawing upon critical work on race. Using extracts from interviews with expatriate women it explores how relational encounters of difference shape discussions of otherness through racialised narratives. I argue that encounters of difference are central to how people embody their own sense of identity, focusing specifically on body size. Talking about body size provides a means through which to discuss difference drawing upon racialised and sexualised narratives. This chapter contributes to feminist and postcolonial perspectives on migration by highlighting how a trans-sizing approach can unpack different structural relations within global cities.

Chapter six presents a summary of the key arguments of the thesis. In so doing, it suggests ways that this work can contribute to the fields of Fat Studies and geographical work on migration, highlighting potential areas for work. I suggest three key contributions of this research: connecting work on body size to that of migration through a trans-sizing approach; to work within Fat Studies and critical geographies of size through cross-cultural and transnational perspectives; and finally, highlighting the necessity of appreciating body size as an axis of identity that can open up new ways to explore how people experience place.

Chapter Two: Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This chapter situates my research within wider discussions and debates surrounding feminist research and studies of body size. The purpose is to both assess the validity of the methods I employed, and critically reflect on the research process. To do so, I focus throughout on the intersections of feminism and Fat Studies to politicise my methodology (Moss, 2002). Ultimately I seek to engage with wider discussions of how to *get at* transnational experiences of body size. Furthermore I contribute to a gap in literature on the methodological and ethical aspects of researching body size, challenging the quantification and medicalisation of sized bodies that dominate the way sized bodies are conceptualised in many disciplines (Monaghan, 2008; Anderson, 2012). Although there is a range of social science literature that seeks to research social experiences through the employment of qualitative methodologies to issues of embodied difference (Crang, 2003), far fewer have done so to experiences of body size. Within geography, methodological approaches to sized bodies are largely dominated by quantitative methods that seek to count and map populations that are ‘at risk’ from obesity (Herrick, 2008). In order to critique methods and approaches to body size that quantify it, this research is shaped through feminist approaches to work on bodies and emerging research within the interdisciplinary field of Fat Studies. In this chapter, I reflect upon the ways that my theoretical framework, shaped by feminist engagements with bodies and emerging work on Fat Studies, is implicit within the way my methodology was structured and the subsequent analysis of results. I argue that methodologies that are attentive to, and representative of, nuanced understandings of body size, provide a progressive means through which to critique the multiple ways that people experience their social worlds through their (sized) bodies – be it within research on body size specifically or not.

In order to both evaluate my research approach and contribute to wider methodological and theoretical debates on body size this chapter is separated into three parts: part one, will provide a background to the research through a brief discussion of Singapore as the field site, a description of the participants involved, and recruitment and access. Part two, will outline how my research approach was developed through uniting work on feminist methodologies and studies of body size in order to critically analyse the methods used and the data analysis I employ. Finally, part three discusses the practicalities and issues of doing research through the perspectives I have gained

since returning from my fieldwork. Overall it is my aim to highlight the importance of valuing body size as a central aspect of both embodied experiences and the research process.

Part I: Research background

This research took place during a six-month period of fieldwork between September 2012 and March 2013 within the Republic of Singapore. During this time I lived in Singapore as an expatriate and became a member of various expatriate groups and organisations and attended functions specifically aimed at expatriates. Here I provide an overview of the participants and their recruitment.

2.2 The participants

As discussed previously in chapter one, there were several reasons for choosing to focus only on expatriate women. Ultimately, my decision to interview women is motivated by the need to illuminate accounts of the gendered nature of *women's* experiences of migration by valuing women's subjective experiences (Man, 2004; Silvey, 2006; Blunt, 2007). Concurrently, I do so to challenge the systematic marginalisation of women's experiences of expatriate migration that has often been the result of privileging economic approaches (Willis and Yeoh, 2002). I am guided by feminist critiques of traditional approaches of 'having only men interview men about both men's and women's beliefs and behaviours' (Oakley, 1993, p. 18). Instead, I seek to speak to women about their own experiences from a perspective that values the everyday ways that these are expressed. The focus here is upon women's experiences, which I do by valuing their words and stories within the place of the interviews, in the thesis and in the further discussion this work stimulates.

Additionally, as I also discussed in chapter one, the central participant group that this research is focused upon is expatriates. Again, while there are several reasons for this, it is broadly a result of the following three reasons. Firstly, expatriate migrant women have received far less academic scrutiny than those from developing countries (Willis *et al.*, 2002). This is understandably likely to be a result of the marginalisation and oppression women from developing countries experience socially, culturally, economically and politically. However, as Fechter (2010) argues, by doing so we risk perpetuating a limited view of global migration. As a result, the position and experiences of those that are defined as privileged migrants often result in homogenous

or taken for granted assumptions regarding their positioning within the world (Fechter and Walsh, 2010). It is essential therefore, to critique and recognise the range of voices at play within studies of migration ensuring that multiple perspectives are recognised within discussions of social justice, gender equality and rights to the city (Dwyer and Jones, 2000). Secondly, within Fat Studies there are calls for work situated within cross-cultural perspectives in order to attend to the largely Anglo-American focus that studies have so far explored (Cooper, 2009). While it could be argued that this research is still primarily focused upon Anglo-American discourses regarding body size, it is my intention to contextualise these within discussions of migration and cross-cultural encounters, specifically within Singapore. In so doing, I seek to expose the multiple and complex ways that people experience their size and cultural discourses of such when they move over borders. Additionally, this work provides new ways of understanding postcolonial encounters within the context of discussions of size, exploring how body size discourses provide a language and means through which people can situate difference and their emotional experiences of migration. Finally, as this chapter will show, there were several practical and ethical reasons for choosing a group that I could already, to some extent relate to, situating myself firmly within this research project. The participants I spoke with varied in regards to their nationality and age. I suggest that this is a result of my choice to privilege the ‘expatriate community’ as opposed to national ones. For many of the people I spoke with, nationality or a shared sense of ‘home’ provided far less common-ground than experiences shared regarding migration. As Maddy (38, Australia) suggested, “I’ve been away for so long now I never get [understand] Australian references, like about TV and things”. Additionally, by speaking to a range of women of ages and nationalities I seek to contribute a rich and varied perspective to cross-cultural studies of body size, focusing specifically on experiences of women and those that consider themselves to be expatriates.

In total 50 people were formally interviewed during the research (45 interviews and one focus group with five people). All of the participants were women who identified themselves as expatriates living in Singapore. The self-identified home countries of the women varied, as did the length of times that they had been expatriates within Singapore. Some of the women had lived as expatriates in other countries but for many, Singapore was the only place they had lived outside of their home country. All of the women had migrated due to either employment opportunities, lifestyle choices or to accompany their partners or spouses. The length of time that the women had lived in Singapore varied widely with the shortest time of six weeks to the longest of 24 years.

The average length of time that the participants had lived in Singapore was five years. Table 2.1 gives a breakdown of the lengths of expatriation within Singapore and Table 2.2 gives a breakdown of the demographics of the women I interviewed.

Length of expatriation in Singapore	Number
Under 1 year	11
1-2 years	13
3-5 years	12
6-10 years	9
Over 10 years	2
Not given	3

Table 2.1: Length of the expatriation of participants in study

As Table 2.1 shows, the lengths of time that the participants had lived in Singapore are clustered around shorter expatriations of under five years. Table 2.2 provides a breakdown of the participant demographics. I have grouped the participants into categories for ease of understanding (Appendix A shows a more detailed list of each participant's demographics). However, when asking to provide their details I gave each participant a form with blank spaces (Appendix B) for each answer, instead of boxed categories to tick. In doing so, the women were able to write what they felt best identified them, instead of forcing them to identify with pre-defined categories. Not only did this allow the women the opportunity to account for many racial groups and nationalities I may not have considered, it also allowed them to comment and question what I meant, and allowed them to reflect on how they felt about their identities. Questions regarding the *age*, *nationality*, *occupation before migration* and *ethnicity* of the women were often answered with ease. However, *current occupation* was often met with a range of questions and responses, particularly for women who had stopped working upon migration and were now what they considered "housewives" or "homemakers". Comments provided in brackets such as "oh-no-I-hate-that" and "ahh" highlight the frustration that some of the women felt at their new identities. I will discuss this further in chapter three.

Category		Number
Age	20-29	3
	30-39	21
	40-49	16
	50-59	6
	60-69	1
	No answer	3
Nationality	British	25
	American	6
	Australian	6
	Canadian	3
	Indian	2
	Mexican	2
	Portuguese	1
	Colombian	1
	Dual nationality	2
	Bulgarian	1
	New Zealand	1
Ethnicity	White	36
	Hispanic	4
	Indian	4
	Irish	1
	Chinese	1
	Filipino	1
	Greek	1
	Indonesian	1
	Korean	1
Marital Status	Married	46
	Single	1
	Living with partner	2
	Divorced	1
Number of dependants	0	12
	1-2	30
	3+	5
	No answer	3
Employment status	Employed	20
	Unemployed	28
	Retired	1
	No answer	1
Employment status prior to migration	Employed	48
	Unemployed	2
	Retired	0
	No answer	0

Table 2.2: Breakdown of participant demographics

As table 2.2 shows, the age, nationality and ethnicity of the women I interviewed varied. However, the participants predominantly self-defined as from the UK and as white. I discussed earlier in this chapter my reasons for choosing to speak to women from a variety of backgrounds and ages, informed by my desire to capture the range of experiences that women have towards migration and to explore the ways that women from different nationalities and ages may talk about their experiences. However, as my sampling strategy involved a snowballing technique, and due to the fact that I am British and many of my initial contacts were British, there was a tendency to be contacted by British expatriates. It may also be that I was able to establish rapport easily with the British expatriates by discussing experiences based on shared understandings of the differences between the UK and Singapore. The majority of the women I spoke to were also white, although I did not explicitly set out with this intention, very few women from varying ethnicities contacted me. As I highlighted in chapter one this is likely to be a result of preconceived understandings of what constitutes an expatriate as a result of the history and legacy of British colonialism within Singapore. For many, expatriate is often only associated with white migrants, whereas non-white migrants are often defined as immigrants (Rogaly and Taylor, 2010). Interestingly, it was only the non-white expatriates that checked with me prior to the interview if they qualified as suitable to partake. It would appear that for many expatriate is a term most acknowledged to be associated with people that identify as white. This could also be a result of the fact that I myself am white (a photo of me was included on my website – fig 2.2, p. 36)

2.3 Recruitment and access

The parameters I set in order to define the group of participants I wanted to speak with remained broad. Ultimately, I sought to speak to women that identified as expatriates within Singapore with a focus on everyday experiences. It was up to those that saw my research adverts to decide if they wanted to speak to me as I did not approach anyone directly. It is clear from the number of people that approached me and the limited work I needed to do myself to find participants that this is a group of people that were particularly keen to have their stories told, thus legitimising this research further.

My participants were gained through snowball sampling from a few initial contacts that I made prior to and during the six-month period I was in Singapore. The majority of the participants learned about the research through adverts I posted on the

internet which were then re-posted by some of the participants. Many of the participants contacted me after they were told about my research from a friend. This enabled me to quickly access women who may not have heard about my research through internet groups, and legitimised my research and myself as trustworthy and safe to speak to, which may explain why so many invited me to interview them in their homes. Initially I used several methods of accessing participants: social networking sites (Facebook), internet forums (Meetup, Singaporeexpats.com, expatssingapore.com), networking events (Meetup, Internations) and through university contacts.

My main and most successful method of access came from posting my research on the social networking site Facebook. Initially I contacted one organisation for expatriates living in Singapore and attended one of their coffee mornings. Not only did this allow me to familiarise myself with the type of women that were members of the group (mainly non-working women), it also allowed me to introduce myself to, and gain the trust of the committee who were the gatekeepers to participants. By contacting the organisation and meeting with them not only did I meet willing participants at the coffee morning (aimed at newcomers to Singapore), but also had my research legitimised by having the organisation post it on their Facebook group on my behalf (figure 2.1). Initially, my research was posted on three expatriate organisations' Facebook pages, with a link to my university webpage where I discussed in more detail the nature of my research (figure 2.2). Figure 2.1 below is an example of the posting that appeared on the social networking site Facebook. The name of the organisation that shared the link is hidden to maintain the anonymity of my participants.

Initially I was contacted by 12 women that had seen the posting on Facebook. However, after this I found that many of my participants had posted about my research on other social networking sites such as 'Meetup', 'Internations' and mother and baby websites.^{10 11} This often resulted in me asking participants during the interview "where did you hear about the research?", to be told a website I had never heard of. Not only did this allow me to access many women I may not have been able to, or thought to initially, but meant that my research was legitimised by others. It also highlights how enjoyable and valuable many of the women found the experience and my research – a

¹⁰ Meetup.com is a website which allows members to join local groups. Several 'Meetup' groups exist in Singapore for a range of activities such as sports, weight loss, mothers and babies groups etc. with a wide range aimed at expatriates or international people. My research was posted by a few participants on the group pages (www.meetup.com).

¹¹ Internations.org is a global website which organises networking events with a focus on expatriates. In Singapore it was aimed at professionals and events charged a fee for membership.

comment from one participant was that her friend had said “it’s just like having coffee with a friend” (April, 37, Hong Kong).

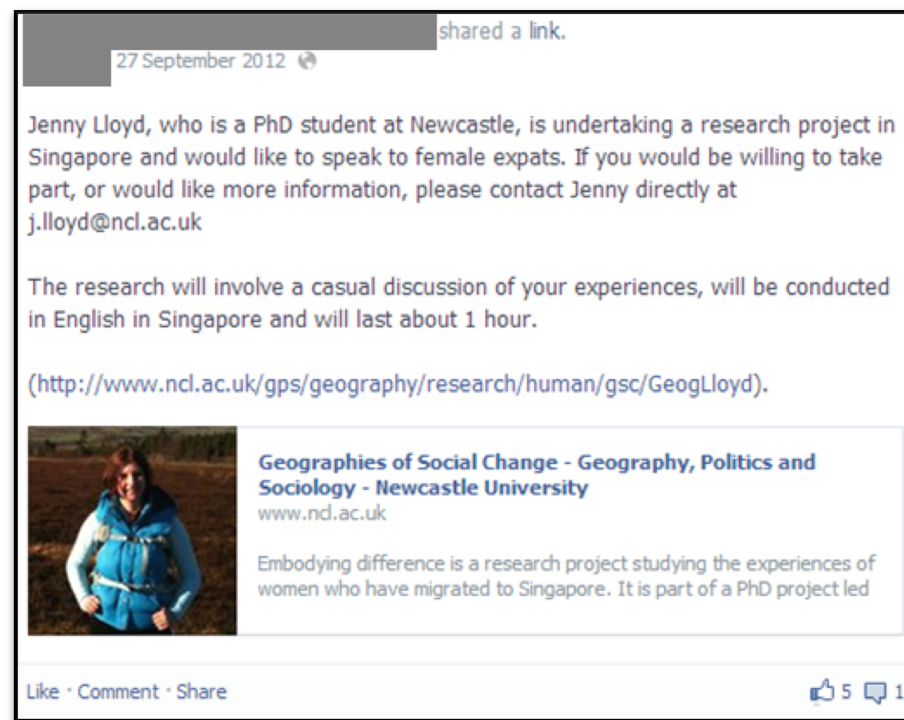


Figure 2.1: Participant recruitment on Facebook

The total number of women that contacted me was 69, 50 of whom I interviewed (45 individual interviews and one focus group of five people). Unfortunately, I was unable to speak to the remaining 19 women that contacted me. This was due to the fact that many of the women that had shown interest in speaking to me were unable to organise a suitable time due to the Christmas holidays and Chinese New Year. Speaking with 50 women provided me with a rich and diverse range of experiences and it was not necessary to speak to more women considering the scope and focus of this project. I would suggest that the large number of women that contacted me highlights the need for more research that values and appreciates the stories of women, and that within Singapore there is significant need for women’s voices to be heard. I would argue that my research provided an opportunity for the women to talk about things that they may not otherwise have been able to, and that having someone listen to them in a supportive environment was a valuable experience.

This method of participant recruitment meant that the majority of my participants contacted me directly, as opposed to me contacting individuals. Not only

did this mean that the women did not feel pressured to partake, it also meant that they decided what the definition of expatriate or migrant was. In chapter one, I discussed the problems with defining what it is to be an expatriate. By allowing the women to contact me I left it up to them to decide if they felt they were suitable for my project. Figure 2.2 below shows my University webpage which participants were directed to for information about my research.

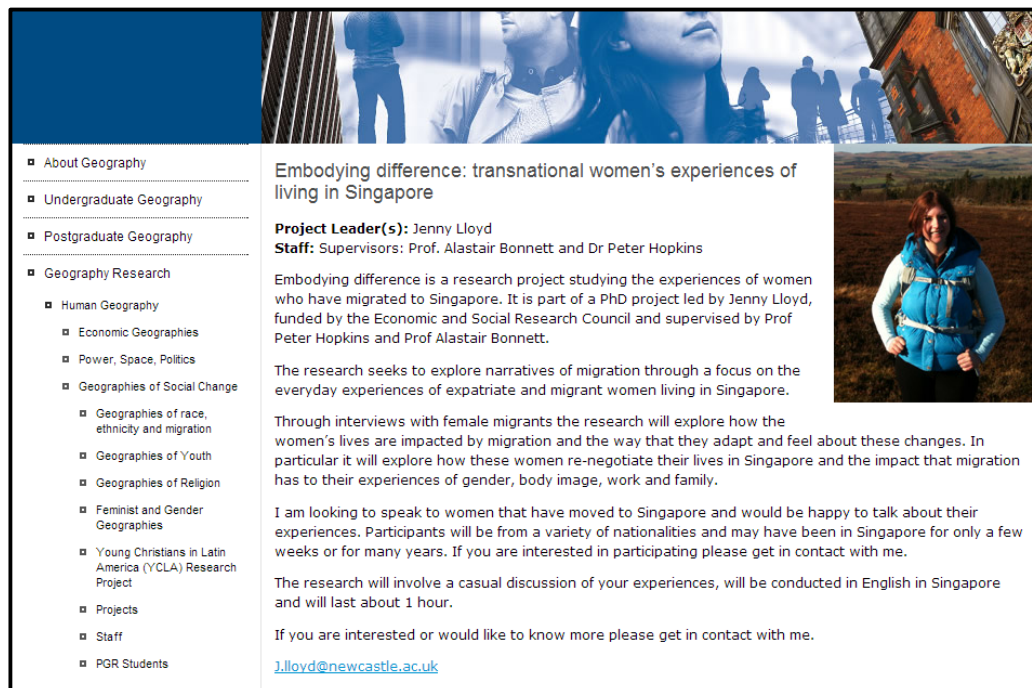


Figure 2.2: University webpage and research advert

Finally, in addition to using social networking sites to gain access to participants I also attended three networking events (Internations, an expatriate organisation event and Meetup), met with contacts that I gained through colleagues and friends, and posted about my research on expatriate forums. The latter method proved to be the least successful only gaining me one participant and mainly being ‘trolled’ by anonymous internet users.¹² I decided to use this method in order to recruit expatriate women specifically with the focus of discussions surrounding body size, yet unfortunately, posting about my research on forums left me vulnerable to trolling and got me banned from one forum which considered my post to be ‘advertising business’.

¹² Trolling is “a common phenomenon in online discussion groups [where an] individual baits and provokes other group members, often with the result of drawing them into fruitless argument and diverting attention from the stated purposes of the group” (Herring et. al., 2002)

I would argue that my method of recruitment and of gaining access to participants is fundamental to understanding the discussions I had and should be considered throughout the analysis. Allowing participants to decide themselves if they wanted to contact me, meant that I only spoke to and represent the voices of women that wish to have their stories heard without feeling forced to do so. There are three main reasons that I believe prompted the women to want to participate in my research: First, it could be argued that many of those that wished to be involved in this research chose to do so as result of feelings of frustration at their situations within Singapore, as a result of their employment or legal status as ‘dependants’ or as not engaged in formal employment. Second, because of the amount of free time some of the women had, this was something to fill their time. Finally, many reflected that they wanted to engage in intelligent conversation or that they had done research when at university and wished to ‘help me out’ to find participants. These factors will undoubtedly play a part in the narratives, although I do not believe that this limits the research as it is precisely the subjective nature of their experiences that I seek to explore.

Additionally, the way my research was framed has implications for the recruitment of participants and the way they discussed issues such as body size. As figure 2.2 shows, my research advert did not specifically focus on contacting women regarding body size. Consequently, this resulted in me speaking to women about a range of topics but also to those that may not have thought explicitly about body size. My intention in doing so was specific, as I sought to explore the range of ways that size is experienced and narrated, not only for those with fat bodies but a range of material sizes. As I argue elsewhere (Lloyd and Hopkins, 2015, p. 3), ‘there is a difference between the issues faced by those that may be considered ‘normatively’ sized and may *feel* fatter, and those who are physically much larger and as such must deal with a range of issues regarding their size’. This is not to say that one group’s views are more important, but that I must acknowledge that many of the women’s slenderness and ‘thin privilege’ meant that certain embodied aspects of size were not acknowledged or experienced (Donaghue and Clemitshaw, 2012). I argue that by utilising a transnational approach we can explore how migration is integral to experiences of body size. For example, how many of the women experienced their physical materiality differently through migration, such as clothing sizes, the built environment and relational interactions. As such, it is the crossing of borders and movement into Singapore that many women, who within their home countries considered themselves to be

normatively sized, experienced their body size in different ways. I develop these ideas further in the following analysis chapters.

Part II: The research project

This research project was shaped by feminist epistemological frameworks grounded in experience-based approaches. This required me to make present and visible the experiences of women by reconceptualising traditional understandings of migration by placing an emphasis on women's subjective experiences (Harding, 1987). I seek to challenge dominant models of expatriate migration that have often marginalised women's experiences by recognising the situated and gendered aspects of migration. However, a feminist approach is more than 'not excluding half the human from human geography' (Monk and Hanson, 1982, p. 11) by including women within research, but about questioning the nature of how we begin to construct knowledge and understanding altogether, by moving beyond traditional approaches of social enquiry which value objectivity, accuracy and universality (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Therefore, by placing myself at the centre of my research, this project was shaped through my own biographies and perceptions as a human being (Harding, 1987), it was ultimately 'intensely personal' (England, 1994, p. 251). My age, class, race, nationality and body size were brought into the research process itself, and rather than distancing myself from my participant; appreciating that personal involvement was the only way I could become a fortunate witness to these women's lives.

In addition to valuing both women's voices and engaging a reflective and self-critical approach, intersubjectivity remained a central tenet of how this research was undertaken. It is my aim to provide a means through which to explore women's personal narratives. Through the telling of stories, I seek to explore scales of analysis that are otherwise overlooked but are significant within enforcing particular gendered relations in places (Staeheli and Lawson, 1995). Through recounting stories and developing research through conversational styles, it is the aim of this project to engage an approach that challenges traditional methods resulting in binary constructions. As such, a narrative-based approach was developed to explore embodiment as opposed to positivist methods which have often resulted in the Cartesian separation of mind and body, rendering bodies absent from analysis (Rose, 1993a; Longhurst, 1995). By getting women to construct their own biographies and tell stories about their everyday lives using their own words, it is the aim of this thesis to explore the multiple ways that bodies are implicated spatially and the nature of gendered relations within this

(Valentine, 1999b). I seek to create theory which is grounded in the lives and experiences of women in their own words, in ways that are personal, subjective and emotional (Du Bois, 1983).

2.4 Fat studies emerging methodologies

Informed by work within Feminist, Queer and Disability studies, research within Fat Studies has also significantly guided the methodological approach I employ within this project. Ultimately, Fat Studies is concerned with critiquing medical ideas regarding obesity by valuing and showing how ‘fat is a fluid subject position’ (Cooper, 2010, p. 1021). In order to do so, qualitative methodological approaches have become central to critical interrogations of how body size is constituted both socially and spatially (Dyck, 1999; Herrick, 2007; Andrews *et al.*, 2012). Fat Studies scholars have sought to challenge dominant medicalised work on body size, and within critical geographical work have argued against methods that count and map obesity (Evans and Colls, 2009; Evans *et al.*, 2012). Instead, approaches that value subjective experiences of embodiment focus on the narrations and multiple ways that fatness is felt and lived (LeBesco, 2004). As Colls and Evans (2009, p. 1016) suggest, these approaches do so, ‘by considering examples of how dominant constructions of obesity and fatness are materialised and experienced across a range of spatial and temporal contexts’. While Fat Studies approaches do not necessarily entail qualitative methodologies (Campos *et al.*, 2006), an adoption of such provides rich potential for illuminating accounts of body size beyond numerical measures, for example BMI and weight. This research project is guided by Fat Studies work in its critical stance towards dominant medical, moral and cultural discourses that surround fat bodies in the West (Evans, 2006; Hopkins, 2012). By challenging the unquestioned assumption that fatness is inherently problematic, I question the stigmatisation of bodies of different sizes and recognise the social value of bodies of all sizes in different places (Cooper, 2010; Colls and Evans, 2014).

Despite a growing body of work employing diverse and multiple methods exploring the lived realities of sized bodies (Colls, 2006; Hopkins, 2012), there has been a lack of scholarly attention focused on the methodological and ethical issues associated with work of this nature (Lloyd and Hopkins, 2015). This chapter therefore, seeks to contribute towards this literature in three ways: Firstly, through a critical discussion of the ethical and methodological issues of research on body size. I contribute to a gap in literature within Fat Studies highlighting how my approach is useful to other scholars

working on body size, for example, those employing medical approaches to fatness; Secondly, it is hoped that the analysis and findings within this project will further prompt academics to explore the social implications of body size to social experiences; Thirdly, in response to calls for greater cross-cultural and global perspectives on body size, by bringing critical attention to the intersections of culture, ethnicity and otherness within accounts of embodied experiences.

To be clear, this research project is guided by Fat Studies in its approach – both methodological and epistemological – to fatness. Rather than using medical understandings as my starting point and pathologising fatness, I will explore both its social constructions and material embodiments. Work within Fat Studies has guided the ways that I explore body size. By engaging with this interdisciplinary field, I seek to highlight the necessity of recognising body size as an axis of identity that would usefully contribute to geographical (and other academic studies) of subjective experiences. However, while Fat Studies guides my approach, I recognise that my work also differs to some in that I do not focus on fatness exclusively, but rather a range of sized experiences (Fikkan and Rothblum, 2012). Instead, my contribution to Fat Studies and geographical studies of migration is an exploration of transnationalism and cross-cultural interactions – when bodies move over borders. The following section will interrogate the methods I used and their appropriateness by bringing together feminist, Fat Studies and transnational approaches to research methods.

2.5 In-depth interviews

During the six-month period of fieldwork in Singapore, I conducted 45 in-depth interviews with women that identified as expatriates, and one focus group with five women. All of the interviews were conducted in English in Singapore, were face-to-face and had been arranged beforehand over e-mail, telephone or Facebook messenger. All of the interviews were conducted one-to-one apart from two interviews where another woman (a friend of the participant) was either present for the first-half or the second. Despite initially considering using a mixed method approach, I decided to use in-depth interviews as my primary method of research because it soon became apparent, upon completing a few interviews, that the women I was speaking to were very comfortable with this format and style, and that it generally fit well within their own preconceptions of what my research would entail.

In-depth interviews offer a way for researchers to begin to understand the diversity of lived experiences of their participants by listening to and valuing experiences that may otherwise be subjugated (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006; Hesse-Biber, 2014). Through an approach which values the language and words which participants use to construct their own reality (DeVault, 2004), in-depth interviews encourage rich, subjective dialogues with the aim of minimising the hierarchical relationship between researcher and participant (Oakley, 1993; Sarantakos, 2004). By grounding my research within an anti-positivist, feminist epistemological framework I have endeavoured to capture the experiences, emotions and thoughts of female expatriates in Singapore in their own words. It is not my aim to make universal statements and generalisations about female expatriates, but instead I hope that in-depth interviewing has allowed me to (re)present the words, thoughts and feelings of these women's lives as they were told to me (Reinharz and Davidman, 1992). By valuing subjective experiences it is my understanding, like Parr (1998b, p. 351), that 'the theorisation of place and space, ... are best achieved by messy methodologies which seek to 'tune in' to research participants' different ways of telling'. In so doing, I hope to unsettle homogenous and stereotypical understandings of expatriate women's lives, by making present the subjective situation of these women within the social sciences and wider society (Oakley, 1993).

All of my interviews varied between participants. The shortest interview lasted fifteen minutes while the longest exceeded three hours (the average interview length was one and a half hours). Guided by textbook advice on employing an ethical, non-hierarchical research approach, I was aware that in order to be sensitive to the needs of the women I spoke to, and allow them to have greater control in the research process, it was likely that my interviews would be 'messy and complex' (Sharp, 2005, p. 305). Although initially having an interview schedule (Appendix C), I quickly abandoned this during my first interview when I realised that it was acting as a barrier. Not only did the interview transcript (a piece of paper) reinforce the conventional hierarchical roles of the researcher and interviewee, I found it difficult to listen intently without being distracted as I tried to follow the interview and ensure I knew which question on my schedule I should ask next. Instead, for the remaining interviews (and the second half of the first), I used a semi-structured approach. In doing so, I was able to build a relationship with my participants while carefully introducing topics when it seemed more appropriate or relevant. It allowed the women to tell their stories 'in their own way' (Reinharz and Davidman, 1992, p. 25), enabling them to determine the depth and

amount of information they disclosed, while signalling to me which areas were important to them and that they felt comfortable discussing. Rather than focus on the individual issues of doing in-depth interviews from a feminist perspective – which there is already a large body of work on (Reinharz and Davidman, 1992; Moss, 2002). This section will focus on the issues regarding in-depth interviews from a Fat Studies perspective.

2.5.1 Talking about bodies

In-depth interviews were particularly useful as a means of getting the women talking about their bodies and body size. However, this may not be the most suitable approach for all projects centred on discussions of sensitive topics such as body size, weight loss and eating habits as it relied heavily on my ability as a researcher (and a human being) to identify and sympathetically approach areas which I felt the participant could discuss more (Corbin and Morse, 2003). All of the interviews started with ‘ice-breaker’ questions, ones which the women would be happy answering, for example, “how long have you been in Singapore?”, “why did you move here?”, “how long do you plan on staying?”. These questions often resulted in lengthy discussions about the broader issues of migration and allowed the women to control the topics discussed. It also allowed me time to build rapport with the women and decide appropriate times to expand on topics I was particularly interested in. Rather than asking intrusive or overly personal questions about body size, I decided to approach the topics through discussions of more familiar themes such as food consumption and clothes shopping. The success of getting women to talk in detail about their experiences was varied. Many of the women spoke at length while others often by-passed the topics altogether as not relevant to them (I will discuss this further in chapter four). It is my understanding that the conversational format of semi-structured interviews meant that women were able to talk about their bodies in a way that is familiar to them. As Charmaz (1986) suggests (cited in Reinharz and Davidman, 1992, p. 16), this took place through an approach which ‘draws on skills in the traditional “feminine role”’.

It is my argument that semi-structured interviews were a successful way of getting the women to speak to me about their experiences of body size because conversations about body size (and more often than not – weight loss) are part of the social scripts which exist as part of (some) women’s everyday gendered performances (Motschenbacher, 2009). This is not to say that all women talk about their bodily satisfaction or that all women are dissatisfied with their bodies. However, I suggest that

the proliferation of popular and medicalised discourses surrounding bodies within the West is so endemic within cultural discourses, that social ideals surrounding the body are often discussed in (some) women's daily interactions (Guendouzi, 2004). As such, discussions surrounding body size, weight loss and fitness are often topics which women may be particularly adept at discussing as part of their gendered performances. Within Singapore, it was often the case that discussions surrounding weight loss, body size and 'health' dominated many expatriate conversations I had both during interviews and in my life as an expatriate, and as such was a topic that many of the women felt comfortable discussing. However, I suggest that the way women narrate experiences of body size are complex and may often be a product of how they have been socialised to discursively present themselves. As Guendouzi (2004, p. 1649) suggests, 'While in the enactment of their everyday lives, [although] the women may be satisfied with their own body-size, their talk shows they are subject to social pressure in relation to attaining perceived ideals of body-size'. Although comments such as "I know I need to lose weight" (Cath, 45, Wales) and "I need to eat less" (Sonja, 35, Canada) were common among the interviews, my aim was to explore the contradictory and ambiguous nature of women's relationships with their bodies through the interviews (something I will explore further in chapter four). Semi-structured interviews were a way to not only get women talking about their transnational experiences of body size, but additionally a way to understand how they construct their reality through discursive constructions of their bodies to me. As Motschenbacher (2009, p. 2) states, 'the way the body is talked about in public has consequences for how the body is subjectively felt by individual people'. However, I do not wish to purely concentrate on these discursive constructions of bodies, and am reminded that knowledge is always embodied, emotional, relational and *material* (Longhurst, 2001).

2.5.2 Reciprocity in Fat Studies research

The need for a reciprocal approach to qualitative research is well recognised as essential to projects that seek not only to gather 'data' that is rich and plentiful (Harrison *et al.*, 2001), but is also beneficial to the experiences of the participant (Lather, 1986). Feminist qualitative research has been fundamental in progressing reciprocity in research as a valuable and essential approach (Oakley, 1993). In so doing, feminist writers seek to move beyond theories of participants as solely data sources, towards research approaches that are considered mutually beneficial to both researcher and participant (Robertson, 2000). As Lather (1986, p. 263) suggests, 'reciprocity implies

give-and-take, a mutual negotiation of meaning and power. It operates at two primary points in emancipatory empirical research: the junctures between researcher and researched, and between data and theory'. While it is my aim to engage a reciprocal approach, it is unlikely that I can ever know that reciprocity has been achieved. As I try to do so however, I remain mindful of questioning who benefits from research and the ways through which this can be achieved. Ultimately, in order to do so I acknowledge that as a researcher I construct and analyse this research through my own subjective positioning within the world, and so too do the women I speak with. Following from Domosh (2003), I suggest that reciprocity is about acknowledging that the interview, and the stories they tell, are *as* discursively situated as my own analysis of them.

Within Fat Studies reciprocity is recognised as inherent within research that is dedicated to critiquing the dominant and negative stereotypes associated with fatness within the West (Solovay and Rothblum, 2009). Within this project, I employed a reciprocal approach throughout. It was hoped that the interviews would act as a space where the women could talk about the multiplicity of their embodied and emotional experiences of migration in their own words, and in doing so shape and guide the project. At the same time, I was aware that in order for the participants to share with me it was essential that I placed myself and my own experiences within the research process, not only through reflective practice (discussed later in section 2.10), but as a young female expatriate with my own experiences and emotions surrounding my material and discursive corporeality. Like Colls (2006, p. 535), sharing experiences helped me develop rapport. However, I remained conscious that 'my embodied identity could also create a distance between myself and the research participants as my body was evaluated (in)favourably in relation to their own'. Like Colls (2006), I remain mindful of the ways that my own embodied identity impacts the narration and representation of other women's bodies. Below is an extract taken from my fieldwork diary that highlights some of the complexities of reciprocity within Fat Studies research:

Extract from fieldwork diary

I met today with a woman who runs an expatriate weight loss group. I had explained to her over email what my research was on and that I was interested in attending the group or possibly speaking to some of the members if they were happy to. Upon meeting me she seemed instantly surprised and I can only assume that this is because perhaps she was expecting someone fatter than me and maybe older. Instantly aware that she seemed somewhat distrusting of me I felt the need to very quickly disclose my own personal experiences of weight loss and body size in Singapore and the difficulties I had with finding healthy food to eat and a desire not to gain weight. She asked me how much weight I had lost and how quickly and when I replied she commented “that’s a bit too quick in my opinion”. I felt immediately uncomfortable and embarrassed. In revealing so much I felt vulnerable to her judgement, as a young woman that is conscious of weight loss, but also almost apologetic that I had done so quickly. I felt compromised, on the one hand as a researcher wanting to be as open and honest as I was asking my participants to be, and on the other, as a young woman wanting to protect myself from the possible judgement I may receive about my own experiences of body size.

The above extract indicates some of the dilemmas and contradictions of reciprocity as an approach to Fat Studies research. Throughout the research I was happy to discuss my own experiences and emotions with my participants, which often resulted in an atmosphere conducive of sharing and support. However, although theoretically as a feminist researcher I accept the concept of ‘no intimacy without reciprocity’ (Oakley, 1993, p. 49), it is important to remember that as a human, with my own thoughts, feelings, emotions and various positions, we are not necessarily by default as researchers, automatically in a position of power. Instead at times we are left open to vulnerability. It is not simply a case of unproblematically labelling specific groups and individuals as being powerful or possessing ‘the power’ – as it could be argued in the case of interviewing elites (Harvey, 2010). Instead, as opposed to the binary categories of ‘powerful’ and ‘powerless’ in an interview, it may be more useful to understand researchers and participants as positioned in a ‘web of social relations’ (Woods, 1998, p. 2105).

Within this research it is important to recognise the multiple and subtle shifts in relations within the interview setting. As Smith (2006) suggests, by using a post-structuralist understanding of power we can begin to explore it as fluid and flexible, continually circulating and changing throughout the interview (Allen, 1997). While many have warned of the hierarchies of power that exist in research, often with an assumption that the researcher may automatically be in a position of power, this may not always be the case (hooks, 2000). Instead, as it was the case in this project, interviewers and participants are multiply positioned throughout the interview (Valentine, 2002). However, I would argue that ultimately the researcher maintains a position of power at the point of interpretation and representation, and as such it is essential that I recognise my participants' subjectivity throughout both the research and analysis (Reay, 1996). Therefore, within this project reciprocity has meant both attention to, and careful consideration of who benefits from research and whose subjectivity is recognised at both the point of interview and analysis. In being as open and honest as possible about my own body size and emotions regarding this, it is possible to leave myself open to scrutiny and judgement – be this real or imagined – but is an essential aspect of a reciprocal approach. Indeed, I would suggest that I may not always have been fully prepared for the consequences of research that places my own body and emotions so centrally, and that in asking others about their experiences of body size, that I too would have to come to terms with my own, and the experiences of having my body looked at and perhaps judged by others.

2.5.3 Location of interviews

The location of the interviews was always determined by the participants themselves allowing them to decide on somewhere familiar that they felt comfortable with, particularly as the majority of the women did not already know me. In total 22 of the interviews were conducted in coffee shops, restaurants or hawker markets, 20 in the participants' homes, and 3 in their place of formal employment.¹³ Although it is difficult to determine how the location may have affected the interview process, and the women's willingness to speak to me about their experiences of body size, it is important that I recognise throughout the analysis that the sites and locations that my interviews and research took place are entrenched with the very social relations I am looking to

¹³ Hawker markets are large cooked food stalls that sell a range of inexpensive foods.

explore (Elwood and Martin, 2000), and as such are likely to impact the participants' construction of reality (Herzog, 2005).

Very little has been written specifically on the location of interviews in Fat Studies research. This is surprising considering the emphasis that Fat Studies scholars (specifically human geographers) give to space and place in people's embodied and relational experiences of body size (Hopkins, 2012). However, it is likely that research that explores these spatial and temporal intersections as significant to the ways through which bodies and places are mutually constructed, are indeed sensitive to and aware of the influence that spaces have to the type and depth of experiences that are shared (Nast and Pile, 1998; Colls and Evans, 2009). Few studies have examined this specifically (notable exceptions would include Colls' (2004, 2006) innovative use of accompanied shopping visits). It is likely that the location of my interviews did affect the research process, and the way that the women experienced and narrated their experiences within that time and space.

Many geographers have acknowledged that research conducted in participants' homes, particularly research that deals with sensitive topics, is often conducive of an environment where participants may feel more comfortable and able to share personal information (Longhurst, 1996; Elwood and Martin, 2000). Furthermore, this may help reduce the hierarchy between participant and researcher (Oberhauser, 1977). Although this may have been the case in my research, I do not believe it is this straightforward. Interviews in my participants' homes often lasted longer than those in public places. When interviews overlapped with childcare responsibilities I often helped out, meaning that sometimes interviews were conducted while I sat on the floor playing with children or while mothers breastfed. I believe that much of this helped contribute to building rapport between myself and the women I spoke with (Oakley, 1993). Therefore, using the lens of Fat Studies and transnationalism, it is important to unpack the multiple ways that spaces and places intersect with the sized body. Particularly when those spaces are implicit in the multiple ways that women narrate those experiences during the interview.

2.5.4 Therapeutic interviewing?

While some of the women did discuss some issues that were personal and sensitive, the extent to which the interviews were emotive varied widely between participants. I would argue, like Bondi (2005a), this is because emotions are not objects to be captured, but relational mediums which flow between researchers, interviewees and different places. Emotions were an integral part of the research process, and in adopting

an approach that valued subjectivity and brought me to some extent into the lives of my participants, it was inevitable that the interviews would become emotional experiences for both myself and the women I spoke with (Widdowfield, 2000; Bondi, 2005b). Although I am not trained in psychotherapeutic techniques or counselling, it soon became apparent during the interviews that through the act of listening and being a witness to the women's retelling of personal stories and narratives, that some of the interviews became deeply personal experiences for them, having what could be considered *cathartic elements* (Rose, 1991). In inviting the women to share their stories with me they were able to explore their experiences by talking about things and making sense of them – sometimes in new ways (Birch and Miller, 2000). It was hoped that the semi-structured nature of the interviews meant that the women were able to guide the interview in a way that they were comfortable with, and often resulted in them discussing topics that I could not have anticipated – highlighting the significance of those issues to their lives. Comments such as “it's like therapy” (Kirstie, 32, UK) suggest the cathartic nature of the interviews, or at least a demonstration of the women's awareness that talking about experiences is popularly understood as a conventional therapeutic approach. As Peters *et al.* (2008) suggest, interviews often become therapeutic when the participant can share their emotions and experiences in a confidential, non-judgemental setting with the researcher's full attention. I would suggest that the cathartic nature of these interviews meant that this project was not just beneficial for myself as the researcher (for the purpose of collecting data), but also for the women that participated in it. I do not wish to suggest that the interviews were necessarily therapeutic, but that the performative nature of talking about topics that may not otherwise be discussed in everyday conversation, with a stranger, gave the illusion of having therapeutic qualities.

It is important to distinguish between therapeutic experiences and those of the interview setting. While many of the women reflected that it was “like therapy”, I would suggest, as Munro does (2013, p. 58) that ‘the telling of stories may lead to a sense of catharsis for the storyteller’, but that there are clear distinctions that must be recognised. Further to this, while many of the topics were emotive, it was not the aim to discuss issues that were overtly upsetting or contentious. Unlike Birch and Miller (2000), I contend that a ‘successful’ interview is not just reliant on the participant disclosing deeply personal and emotional experiences. They suggest that ‘the more intimate and revealing we, as researchers, felt the interview to be, the more we felt we had gathered “real” meanings’ (Birch and Miller, 2000, p. 192). In contrast, for me it was often the

more mundane and quotidian experiences – the passing comments and subtleties – which I felt often encapsulated the women’s experiences and provided nuanced ways of understanding women’s expatriate experiences of body size. I would argue that the ‘mundane’ experiences are no less ‘real’ than the stories that became deeply personal and emotive. Instead, they all contribute to the ways that women embody and narrate transnational experiences of body size. The responses and experiences that women had of body size varied drastically. Many of the interviews were deeply personal in relation to body size while others often discussed it only briefly. Many of the women commented that it allowed them to express and think about things – not just body size – that they may not have had the opportunity to do before, reframing their understandings through the opportunity to talk. In body size research – from a perspective that is critical of dominant discourses surrounding body size – it is not surprising that interviews had therapeutic qualities when the women were provided with the opportunity to discuss topics that are sometimes considered irrelevant or trivial. The extract below was taken from an email sent to me from a participant following her interview and suggests some of the ways that my interviews were a valuable experience for both myself and the women I spoke with:

I was thinking when you left about all these expat ladies who are so keen to chat to you. It's because you're like some form of therapy! You encourage women to say their real experiences rather than keeping up appearances they may need to maintain when meeting new people and trying to make new friends.

I dare say you'll get plenty of people for your forums if you do set them up.... Me included!

If nothing else I find it interesting to know other expat women's views- and get some relief from finding they may feel similar! (E-mail from Kirstie, 32, UK, 2013)

2.6 Focus groups

In addition to the 45 in-depth interviews, I also conducted one focus group with five women from an expatriate weight loss group. I decided to conduct a focus group in order to supplement the data I had from the individual interviews, with experiences from women who were already specifically engaged in conversations regarding body size. In addition, it was hoped that the discussions would be more in-depth and detailed when women were already in a setting that promoted talking about body size. My

assumption was that as the women were already in a group that discusses weight loss, they would feel more comfortable discussing it around each other. However, as I explore below, this was not necessarily the case.

I arranged the focus group through the organiser, who sent an email inviting women who wanted to take part to contact me. In total six women contacted me and five attended on the day. Two of the women had never attended the group and therefore some of the focus group was spent familiarising them with the setup and introducing them. The focus group lasted 45 minutes and was semi-structured. I assumed that, like the interviews, the focus group would become less structured as the women discussed topics in detail. My aim was for the focus group to become participant-led and for the women to construct their experiences in their own words (Tiggemann *et al.*, 2000). However, the discussions stuck fairly rigidly to the questions and the women appeared to be less comfortable diverging from the schedule. This may have been due to a desire not to monopolise the conversation or a concern not to take up too much time.

As I only completed one focus group I do not feel that I can provide a thorough assessment of their value as a method for social research (see Hopkins, 2007 for an in-depth review). However, I would suggest that although I am defining this group meeting as a focus group, it does not fit within traditional understandings of a focus group as a ‘one-off meeting’ (Bedford and Burgess, 2001, p. 121), but neither can it be considered an ‘in-depth small group’ (Burgess *et al.*, 1988, p. 457) (which meets more frequently). As the group was specifically brought together for my research, I would not define it as participant observation. Additionally, the politics of this focus group were made more complex by the leader of the weight loss group being present, and I would suggest that perhaps this influenced the internal politics and dynamics of the group.

This is not to say that focus groups are not a useful way of getting at transnational experiences of body size. However, as my focus is from a critical perspective and the group’s aim is primarily one that considers fatness as ‘bad’, it was more difficult to unpack some of the discourses and experiences surrounding body size. For example, as Throsby and Evans (2013) discuss, I felt at times throughout my interviews and especially during the focus group, conflicted with the problem of wanting to challenge anti-fat rhetoric but remained sensitive of not wanting to challenge my participants’ views and feelings. Like Evans and Colls, I too have struggled throughout with concern that I am complicit in my silence, but mindful of the appropriateness of how to deal with these issues, opting instead to focus on valuing the discursive construction of body size narratives.

The focus group was particularly helpful at addressing some of the transnational aspects of this project as the group was for expatriate women specifically and as such addressed concerns and issues of transnational body size in Singapore, which I will discuss further in chapter five. I would suggest that in this specific case, the focus group provided me with a context for some of the discourses surrounding expatriate experiences of body size in Singapore, but little depth into the embodiment of emotions surrounding these. Had I had more time, it may have been beneficial to have completed individual interviews with the women afterwards.¹⁴ I would still contend that they can be a useful way of getting women to talk about their bodies in a supportive environment, especially in smaller groups (Longhurst, 1996), and that given more time it may have been a method I could have pursued further.

2.7 The ethnographic self

The final method that I wish to discuss in this chapter is the self as ethnographic focus (Coffey, 1999). I do so with caution due to an awareness of the politics and disputes that arise from placing the self within research (DeVault, 1997; Sparkes, 2000; Holt, 2003). Later in this chapter, I discuss the need for reflexivity as essential for highlighting the situated nature of research (Haraway, 1988), and demonstrating the ways that researchers – as human beings – are implicated throughout the research process (Sultana, 2007). My decision to include myself within the research process goes further than reflexive practice, yet it is not quite autobiographical or autoethnographic (Coffey, 1999). Instead, I suggest the ‘self as ethnographic focus’ to be the most accurate, the reasons for which I explore now.

In her paper *Becoming smaller: autobiographical spaces of weight loss*, Longhurst (2012, p. 875) uses autobiography as a method through which to ‘examine some of the spatial and highly paradoxical aspects of body weight reduction through dieting’ (p. 875). In so doing, she explores the embodied nature of research and knowledge construction (Longhurst, 1997), through situating her own complex and contradictory experiences of body size within her research into cultural discourses surrounding weight loss. I understand the value of this autobiographical method in contributing a rich description of personal experience to research. However, I am also cautious of relying too heavily on my own experience as the only source of understanding the research questions in this thesis (this is not to suggest that Longhurst

¹⁴ My visa only permitted me to stay within Singapore for six months.

does either). I do not fully agree that ‘autobiography is a self-centred ethnography’ (Mercer, 2007, p. 575) but remain mindful that research that relies too heavily on personal experience as a method for critically examining structures of marginalisation and oppression (Purcell, 2007), may exaggerate the researcher’s position as an ‘insider’, and ignore the multiple positions that researchers adopt in different times and spaces (Mullings, 1999; Tarrant, 2013). Within critical work on body size several scholars have placed themselves within research, noting the significance and complexities of *coming out* as fat (Sedgwick, 1990; Longhurst, 2005; Murray, 2005). Within this project, I place emphasis on myself to highlight the ‘multiple, contradictory and eminently ambiguous’ embodiments that shaped the research process (Murray, 2005, p. 153).

My position is an ambiguous one. Although I may have been an insider aware of the discourses, pressures, emotions and politics of body size as an expatriate, and been able to use these ‘understandings’ to contribute to accounts of human experience (Purcell, 2009), I remain at the same time a researcher and member of an academic community interested in analysing the social experiences under question (Anderson, 2006). My decision to include myself within the research extends beyond the addition of notes from my field diary on my experience of the research, or a reflection on my impact on it, but as ‘a member in the social world under study and as a researcher of that world’ (Anderson, 2006, p. 384). During my time in Singapore I participated in, and became immersed in the activities and social lives of expatriate women – although arguably, fleetingly. At the same time, I experienced complex and contradictory experiences of body size that I often reflected on in my field diary. At times I felt my own experiences helped me understand expatriate experiences of body size, and many times it is likely they did not. What I propose therefore, is a method of research that is not entirely autobiographical, but guided by an ethnographic focus on the self, one which reflects the emotional and personal implications of embodied research practices (Parr, 1998a). As Coffey (1999, p. 2) suggests:

In writing, remembering and representing our fieldwork experiences we are involved in processes of self presentation and identity construction. In considering and exploring the intimate relations between the field, significant others and the private self we are able to understand the processes of fieldwork as practical, intellectual and emotional accomplishments.

I would suggest that this is particularly relevant in research wishing to critically interrogate experiences of body size. The very nature of Fat Studies as a discipline is

that it aims to challenge dominant and disembodied accounts of fatness as bad, by progressing embodied methodologies and recognising the importance of personal experiences within these. This is not to say that all Fat Studies research must be personal or embodied (Evans, 2006), but it is for these reasons that I have chosen to write my own experiences of trans-sizing into this thesis. However, it should be noted that I do so cautiously. In writing myself into my research I leave myself open to scrutiny (Murray, 2005; Mercer, 2007; Longhurst, 2012). However, I feel that the times that I laughed with, cried, shared frustrations and anger with my participants, and my private moments of feeling too big and clumsy as an expatriate in Singapore, are all essential to my construction and representation of trans-sizing. As Finlay (2002, p. 209) suggests, such a process is ‘full of muddy ambiguity and multiple trails as researchers negotiate the swamp of interminable deconstructions, self-analysis and self disclosure’. It is also full of opportunity.

2.8 Data analysis

The research generated over 70 hours of interview recordings. As such, I needed a method of data analysis that would provide meaningful interpretation of the data (Baxter and Eyles, 1997). The method of analysis that I have used in this research project is a grounded theory approach. In utilising grounded theory I have developed theory from research rather than let my preconceptions shape the way that I analysed the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Corbin and Strauss, 1990). This method of analysis is particularly useful in the analysis of data where there has been little research done previously (Crooks, 2001).

Some findings were analysed during fieldwork but the majority of the interpretation took place after I had returned from Singapore. Rather than using conventional methods of data handling, such as transcribing audio recordings into text and then coding, I sought to use a method that would allow me to analyse and code in a way that valued the ways that the women told their stories for as long as possible. It is often accepted practice that once interviews are completed they should be transcribed as soon as possible in order to produce typed transcripts. However, few have questioned how this quick interpretation of audio to text (further) disembodies the meaning of words. It is my argument that while researchers employ a variety of creative and innovative methods of research and analysis, few have explored the ways data is managed prior to analysis. Although researchers pay careful attention to ensuring that

participants' words remain authentic, the transcription of audio to text and its subsequent representation in written form is often abstracted and detached from the moment it was spoken (Standing, 1998). This is not to say that researchers do not regularly listen and re-listen to interviews, but often much of the coding takes place on written transcripts. It is for these reasons that I decided to manage my data differently, using technology to aid the analysis process.

Once the interviews were completed I used smartpen technology to transcribe them.¹⁵ This involved listening and re-listening to my interviews and then writing notes and codes using a smartpen. The use of this technology allowed me to listen to key points or codes rather than reading the transcripts of them. Every time I wished to find quotes related to certain codes I could easily listen to the interview extract associated with that code. By listening to the recordings a thematic coding approach was used based on themes and ideas I developed during the fieldwork. Once the initial transcription took place, I listened several more times in order to code, by hand, through listening and writing notes with my smartpen. Once I had developed codes I analysed the data again using an axial approach whereby relationships between themes were explored and interrogated (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). What this approach allowed me to do was continually listen to and hear my participants' tones of voice, pauses and laughs rather than reading disembodied transcription of the event. While the initial transcription process was faster than typing, it was still time consuming in that I re-listened to the interviews many more times than I would have done with written transcripts. To manage the data I uploaded it into Livescribe's desktop platform where I could re-code, manage and re-listen to the interviews. In principle I could also transform my written notes into typed notes allowing me to search for keywords, however, I did not find this was necessary.

While ultimately the interviews were typed out in order to be represented within this thesis I believe that transcribing and coding in this way has allowed me to appreciate the nuanced and embodied ways that women told their stories and the meaning behind them for longer than conventional textual transcription methods. While oral recordings are disembodied accounts, much of the meaning is maintained. By listening to, rather than reading, I have been able to analyse the themes and ideas of this research through careful consideration of my participants' own words. Through listening to and coding the interviews I have become familiar with them which allowed me to explore different ideas through the process of writing the research.

¹⁵ I used a Livescribe Echo Pen <http://www.livescribe.com/uk/>.

Part III: Research perspectives

2.9 Validity and representation

In grounding this research within the principles of feminism and a commitment to challenging positivist claims to universal knowledge, I have been vigilant throughout that this research project maintains academic rigour. However, the strategies to which ‘rigour’ can be measured in qualitative research are often open to interpretation, especially due to the flexible nature of many qualitative studies. Therefore in order to ensure that this project adheres to ethical practice I have been guided throughout by feminist approaches in the methods I used, the data analysis stage, and by continually situating my research within feminist theory and work within Fat Studies on embodiment (Baxter and Eyles, 1997).

The qualitative approach I used is not concerned with finding ‘universal truths’ about the nature of expatriate migration in Singapore. Instead I wish to represent the experiences of the expatriate women I spoke with in their own words. In order to ensure the validity of these research findings and provide an analysis that is representative of the views expressed throughout this project I have employed a set of strategies throughout. All the interviews were repeatedly listened to, allowing me to continually hear some non-verbal communication such as laughing, pauses and changes in tone etc. Following each interview I supplemented the audio files with a written account of my thoughts, feelings and initial analysis of what was discussed during the interview. Many of the interviews were supplemented with additional informal meetings or emails where the participants reflected on the interview, or sometimes participants contacted me when they had time to think and if they wanted to provide any more comments. Although the interviews were semi-structured, all of the participants were allowed as long as they wanted to speak with me and none of the interviews were cut short. Finally, all the interviews were conducted in English, a language that all the participants were comfortable speaking in.

I have been particularly conscious about the way that I represent the women I spoke with. It is important to remember that the participants in this study are not passive, but ‘experts of their own experience’ and as such I am accountable to the way that I represent them in this thesis (England, 2006, p. 288). Feminist struggles over claims to knowledge and the politics of representation are well documented (Reinharz and Davidman, 1992; Stanley and Wise, 1993; DeVault, 1996). Through the process of

research, and particularly in writing, we are always involved in an act of representation from a particular perspective, and within a particular network of power in time and space (McDowell and Court, 2010). However, I am also conscious not to allow these ethical dilemmas to overshadow this project and believe that although as a feminist researcher I should be mindful of the way I represent women, I should not allow it to limit the ability for me to make visible the experiences of the women I spoke with (Reinharz, 1993). One way that I have sought to ensure rigour and highlight the politics of representation is through reflexive practice, and highlighting the situated nature of my own knowledge (Rose, 1997). I will discuss this further in the following section.

2.10 Reflexivity and positionality

[a feminist methodology] requires that the mythology of “hygienic” research with its accompanying mystification of the researcher and the researched as objective instruments of data production be replaced by the recognition that personal involvement is more than dangerous bias – it is the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives (Oakley, 1993, p. 58)

Feminist researchers have emphasised the importance that reflexivity and positionality have to the research process (England, 1994; Skeggs, 2002; Kohl and McCutcheon, 2014), acknowledging that researchers are not objective, value free ‘machines’ capable of strictly ‘hygienic’ research, but human beings with a range of emotions, identities and moods (Stanley and Wise, 1993). As the quote by above suggests, rather than minimise the impact (or ‘damage’) that ourselves as researchers – our personalities, our emotions and our identities – have to the research process, we need to recognise the strength that this has in letting us into the lives of our participants. In addition, we must acknowledge that as researchers we do not adopt just one, but multiple positions throughout research (Hopkins, 2007a; Shinozaki, 2012). In so doing, feminist researchers have emphasised the need for researchers to engage reflexive practice throughout in order to examine critically the nature of the research process and the multiple ways that they themselves, as researchers, may impact the research (Fonow and Cook, 1991; Amelina and Faist, 2012). The following section will explore the importance of my own reflexivity and positionality within this project, and will highlight some of the themes that emerged regarding this, such as ambivalence, anxiety of contradiction and mothering.

England (1994, p. 244) defines reflexivity as ‘self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious *analytical* scrutiny of the self as researcher’. She argues that a reflexive approach is essential to overcoming some of the problems of fieldwork. Although not eliminating these entirely, reflexive practice is necessary for revealing the *situatedness* of knowledge and encouraging ethical practice (Haraway, 1991). As Haraway (1988) suggests, no research is neutral and cannot claim universality. Instead, it is always situated within a particular discourse or context, and as such is always from a particular perspective, a particular way of knowing, and a particular position (Moss, 2002). This work has led many social scientists to accept that practising reflexivity and acknowledging their own positionalities is conventional ethical practice (Hopkins, 2007a). Indeed, by practising reflexivity and acknowledging the situated nature of social research, academics can be seen to write their positions into their work by making visible the multiplicity of selves – the raced, sexed, aged, sized, classed self (Madge, 1993; Rose, 1997; Moss, 2002). Ultimately, reflexive practice aims to challenge claims that there can be universal truths. Knowledge is always produced from somewhere, it is always positioned and it is always embodied (Rose, 1997). However, as it has been highlighted elsewhere (Kobayashi, 2003), it is important to be mindful not to detract from the research itself by privileging the role of the researcher. Additionally, while I acknowledge the significance that aspects of my identity (or position) have to the research process, it should not be assumed that positions are always *knowable* or unchanging (Finlay, 2002). Instead, throughout the process of the interviews I occupied multiple positions through relational interactions between myself, the participant, the time or location etc. (Throsby and Evans, 2013; Lloyd and Hopkins, 2015). A reflexive approach throughout has enabled me to explore the significance of these positions and interactions throughout this research.

Throughout my research I have, and continue to employ a reflexive approach in an endeavour to ‘make sense’ of the multiple and complex positions that I adopt throughout this project, particularly through thoughts in my field diary. In so doing, I hope to reflect on – to some degree – epistemological questions surrounding how it is that I have come to ‘know’ and where I am situated within this particular construction of the social world, while remaining mindful of the dangers of assuming one can *know* about their position in the world (Sedgwick, 1990; Lal, 1999). However, like England (1994, p. 244), I disagree with suggestions that reflexivity is merely an exercise in ‘navel-gazing’, but I remain cautious of reminders that there are limits to reflexivity (Kobayashi, 2003, p. 348). Like Kobayashi (2003), I am wary of the ‘relative hierarchy

of reflexive scholarship', that may (unintentionally) lead me to positioning my participants as 'others' to myself, as a white, middle-class graduate, who feels privileged enough to reflect on myself and my participants' positions within the social world. It is not enough to assume that providing a positionality paragraph is sufficient in reducing the hierarchy between researcher and researched; it is not a get-out-clause to the politics of representation, but a way of politicising my methodology through the lens of the multiple positions I adopted (and continue to adopt) throughout this project. Furthermore, it is a chance for me, as a relatively inexperienced researcher, the chance to grapple with some of the issues that I too shared with my participants in regards to expatriate experiences in Singapore.

2.10.1 Ambivalence, mothering, contradiction

Throughout this project I adopted, and continue to adopt, several positions that impacted on the relationship I had between myself and the participants. In this section, I tease out some of the themes that emerged from reflecting upon this during and after the research. Although throughout the interviews it was always my intention for the focus to be on the women's experiences, unsurprisingly the women I spoke with often had many questions about my own experiences. Following from Oakley (1993), rather than remain impartial and avoid personal involvement, I acknowledged that investing my own personal identity – such as sharing experiences, frustrations and emotions – was necessary for reducing the hierarchy between researcher and participant. As a young, white, female, middle-class, single, English and thin researcher, I occupied various positions throughout my fieldwork.¹⁶ In what follows, I highlight how these positions were ambivalent and contradictory, but also significantly based upon a relationship with my participants that positioned them often in a 'mothering' role.

Firstly, the majority of the women I spoke with were interested in my reasons for coming to Singapore. Many appeared to struggle with the idea that I was here just for my research and had come alone – not following a partner – and they were often particularly interested in my relationship status and my funding. The following is an extract from my field diary following a conversation I had at a coffee morning for expatriates.

¹⁶ This sentence initially read 'relatively thin' but upon reflection I note that this reflects my own insecurities and awareness that to claim to be thin is not always socially acceptable for women. This highlights how I too am very much influenced by gendered and social discourses regarding size which I discuss in the following chapter. I have changed this sentence to state 'thin' as this is likely how my body was read by my participants, regardless of this does reflect my own internal insecurities and ambivalence.

Extract from fieldwork diary

Today I attended a coffee morning for new members of the expatriate organisation I have recently become a member of. The morning is designed to allow new members to ‘mingle’ and make friends and connections with other people that have joined the organisation. Although it is not explicitly a women only event there were only women in attendance, all of whom were older than me. As usual, the conversations followed the conventional structure of “how long have you lived here for?”, “where do you live?”, “what does your husband do?” I was standing in a group when one of the women turned to me and asked, ‘so, what does your husband do?’ A little taken aback I replied:

Jenny: I don’t have a husband. (Defiantly)

Woman: If you don’t have a husband then what are you doing here?

Jenny: I’m here for my research. I’m on my own. (Nervously)

Woman: (A little aghast) Oh my god. Oh my god. You’re here on your own?

Other woman: Don’t worry we’ll look after you.

To which the whole group discussed how ‘brave’ they thought I was at moving to Singapore on my own so young and a few offers to look after me if anything went wrong.

The above extract highlights some of the ways that my identity played an important role in the way that I was perceived by participants, and the multiple positions that I, and the participants occupied (Valentine, 2002). Two themes emerge from this extract, firstly it highlights the way that I was often ‘mothered’ by my participants, and secondly the different roles and feelings I had towards my position. Despite assumptions that researchers are often in positions of power to participants (England, 2006), *studying up* opens up the researcher to different and often conflicting ideas of their positions within research and the roles that they play as a researcher (Hyndman, 1997; Moss and Matwychuk, 2000; Smith, 2006). Throughout this project I found myself occupying different positions, often multiple ones throughout an interview, that were a product of where I felt I belonged in relation to the participant. As the above extract highlights, at times I was the young naïve girl who would be ‘taken under their wing’ and ‘shown the ropes’ of how to be an expatriate in Singapore, especially when

interviewing women with children of a similar age to me. While at other times, I acted as the confident and defiant woman that didn't need a husband to survive alone in Singapore.

In the situation above, it is apparent that my participants and I occupied several positions. Firstly, as an unmarried woman (and someone a little frustrated with being asked what my husband does) I was eager to show that I was in Singapore for myself, for my own work (a frustration many of the women I spoke with discussed). Secondly, as someone much younger than the women they often adopted a maternal or educational role to me. Finally, as someone that as a student has significantly lower economic resources and no expatriate package I could be positioned as 'lower' than the women.¹⁷ Therefore, it should not be assumed that the hierarchies of research are clear-cut, but formed through a 'web of social relations' (Woods, 1998, p. 2105). Instead as Smith (2006) suggests, we should 'unpack' the relations of power within wider societal power structures in order to 'expose the unseen, gendered, power-relations' (Rose, 1997, p. 309).

Being younger than all of my participants was particularly significant in the way that I was positioned and in gaining access to participants. Aged 24 when I completed my research my age was often met with different reactions and expectations. Overall I found my age to be beneficial, particularly in gaining access. As a young woman I often seemed unthreatening and at times I felt that women wanted to speak to me to 'help me out'. Sometimes I felt as though I adopted the role of a daughter, often being invited around for dinner or a place to live if I needed it. I do not feel this undermined my role as researcher but instead allowed my participants to feel as though they were in control of the situation.

Another position that is relevant within this research is my own experiences of body size and the way I grappled with issues regarding contradiction and hypocrisy within the research. Like Longhurst (2012, p. 872), my relationship with body size is complex and made contradictory 'by being a feminist scholar who critiques discourse around women and slimness while at the same time desiring to be slim and embarking on a weight loss project'. However, despite this and my fear of being labelled a hypocrite, I again follow from Longhurst (2012) by being open and honest about the complex politics of body size and weight loss, and the multiple ways that they shaped

¹⁷ Expatriate packages are financial packages that ease the movement of a person overseas. Although they vary between companies, typically they cover costs associated with overseas migration such as accommodation, travel and school fees.

this research project. Rather than focus intently on my positions I believe it more important to acknowledge the contradictions and ambivalent ways I negotiated these. Ultimately, as a human living within, and influenced by the very discourses and experiences I am researching, the only way I can account for my own experiences and subjectivity (or hypocrisy) is through acknowledging it. For me, my own feelings regarding my body, even if they open me up to criticism, are important to note here.

Before departing for my fieldwork I started a weight-loss regime and by the time I left for Singapore I had lost a significant amount of weight.¹⁸ This meant that during my time in Singapore I was often consumed with trying to maintain my weight (for anyone that has visited Singapore you will understand that this was not an easy task), and in conveying to my participants a genuine understanding of concerns surrounding body size. Therefore, for the duration of my time in Singapore I was also battling with the politics and processes of the embodied, emotional, material and relational experiences of being a trans-sized body myself (Lloyd, 2013). For example, being a *slimmed* body trying to get at my participants' experiences of body size, often of those that were larger than me. It has not been easy for me to write this into my thesis due to my anxiety of appearing contradictory to politics and theory that I ground this work within. I am aware that by highlighting my own experiences of weight I am open to criticism and that at times I contradict the values of Fat Studies and critical work. However, I believe that acknowledging this contradiction is important. It does not undermine the research but instead highlights one of my positions within the research process, and my embodiment of discourses regarding size. I would suggest that it is through acknowledgement that I gain a greater perspective of many of the ways that my participants experience trans-sizing, and the multiple and contradictory ways that stories are told. I do not think that my honesty here is a weakness, but instead acknowledge my strength in my commitment to challenging the ways that women's bodies are subjected to disciplining agendas.

The following is an extract from my fieldwork diary that discusses these issues.

¹⁸ I do not feel it necessary to state how much weight I had lost, only that it was significant for me and had large implications for the way I thought about my body size in Singapore.

Extract from fieldwork diary

I was thinking about myself yesterday on the bus and how although I don't think I have an eating disorder I am constantly consumed with anxiety surrounding food and what I will be expected to eat. I am always planning what I can eat and the days I can eat less to make up to the days I eat so much, which is much more here than at home. I also thought about how during my interviews I feel that my body is under analysis too, and that I am in a delicate balance. On one hand I want to be able to say that I empathise with the women, yet I am aware that I am often a lot smaller, and because I am younger I am more conscious of this. In order to make up for this I feel the need to say that I have lost weight and that I used to be bigger. Or if I'm talking about how hard it is because there is so much food here, I feel like my body doesn't represent that I eat much, so I need to explain the exercise I do or again reiterate that I've lost weight. It's almost like I don't quite fit in. I am a body that has lost weight, yet at the same time I am a thin body who loves food and is struggling to deal with the physical and emotional impacts of a lifestyle that promotes food consumption.

The above extract discusses the complex and contradictory feelings and thoughts I had during this project, most importantly problems of how to 'get at' my participants' experiences of body size. As this extract suggests, I am concerned that the women will not feel comfortable talking to me about their experiences of fatness because I myself am thin. In order to address this I often found myself (over)emphasising my own weight loss or discussing my own insecurities, in order to legitimise myself within discussions of body size. However, many of my concerns were often unfounded and unnecessary. Most of the women seemed comfortable and happy to discuss their own body size experiences with me or their regimes of weight loss and body work (especially as my approach is from one of size acceptance) (Gimlin, 2007). For me this represents the medicalisation of everyday life through weight-loss cultures that normalise and promote weight loss discussions and practices of surveillance (Armstrong, 1995). As discussed earlier, talking about body size is something which, within the West, is a practice made socially acceptable through the dominance of medical and popular discourses surrounding fatness and obesity in everyday life (Evans, 2006; Evans and Colls, 2009). I suggest that it is through these processes, that social and cultural beliefs and values surrounding body size and health have permeated everyday talk, legitimising the cultural repertoires that women use to talk about their own bodies, in ways that are easily available and normalised (Wetherell, 1996; Guendouzi, 2004). Despite the

probability that for many, experiences of body size are incredibly sensitive and personal, the medicalisation of everyday life, and as I would argue – everyday talk – has resulted in body size becoming a topic that for many of the women I spoke to, they appeared both comfortable and capable in discussing.

2.11 Conclusion

Ultimately this chapter speaks to a gap in literature on the methodological and ethical aspects of doing research on body size (I write about this further in Lloyd and Hopkins, 2015). Broadly I focus on three key themes: Firstly, how this research was theoretically and epistemologically framed by uniting work on feminist qualitative research and work in Fat Studies. Through doing so, I seek to contribute to both literatures and take note of the ways that this research might usefully inform other research on transnationalism and body size. Secondly, I explored the practical aspects of researching body size. I focused on the politics of interviews exploring the shifting and multiple power dynamics between participant and researcher. It has been my argument throughout that valuing subjectivity of both researcher and researched is central to the research process and the analysis and representation of results. Thirdly, I have been reflexive throughout of the ways that my position(s) and identity are implicated within the research, not as an unchanging and knowable *thing*, but as flexible, fluid and interrelational. I have been honest about my own experiences of size and how this shaped the research itself, and will be central to the analysis. Ultimately I argue that an embodied approach is always ambivalent and multiple, it is contradictory because that is how we live our lives, as researchers and as humans. It is this embodied (and thus messy) approach that has shaped the research, and as I explore in the next chapter, the analysis.

Chapter Three: The Discursive Production of Sized Bodies

3.1 Introduction

Discourse is fundamental to the way that bodies are produced. What bodies mean, and the value placed on them varies at different times and within different cultural contexts. As Braziel and LeBesco (2001) argue, bodies, and indeed *sized* bodies, should be understood as historically, culturally, politically and economically constructed. They are of course also spatial, encompassing ‘complex spatial relations’ between sized bodies and the places they encounter (Longhurst, 2005, p. 256). So what happens then when bodies move over borders? How do discourses intersect with sized bodies as they move, and in what ways do they shape the way we experience and narrate our movements? While geographers have brought attention to the theoretical importance of bodies to migration (Silvey, 2004; Jackson, 2015), and Fat Studies scholars have critiqued the discursive construction of fat as bad rhetoric within the West (Murray, 2007; Evans *et al.*, 2008; Wright, 2009), few have united these approaches by taking them both theoretically and empirically – over borders. It is the purpose of this chapter, then, to bring together theoretical work on the discursive production of sized bodies with empirical work focused on transnational women. I focus here on the unique aspects of power, in particular discourses regarding body size, and how they are taken-up, embodied and narrated in the context of migration to Singapore. Primarily, this chapter explores how dominant narratives regarding health and body size intersect with those of migration. The focus of this chapter is to explore women’s experiences, where Singapore provides a context in which these discussions take place.

As Murray (2005, p. 154) states, ‘It is not a revelatory declaration to say that, in the West, we exist in a culture of a negative collective “knowingness” about fatness’. It is also fair to say that within Singapore, anti-fat discourses shape contemporary understandings of fatness for many people. Like many other nations, medical and popular discourses surrounding fatness within Singapore are dominated by homogenous understandings of fatness as inherently bad, unhealthy and unattractive (Evans, 2006; Isono *et al.*, 2009). It has been suggested that ‘Singapore has succumbed to panic over the “obesity epidemic”’ (Isono *et al.*, 2009, p. 136). As I have made clear so far, it is important to critique anti-obesity discourses, by offering alternative narratives to what has become a monolithic tirade against fatness, by recognising the significance and

implications body size discourses have to different people in different places. As Wann suggests:

Whenever members of a society have recourse to only one opinion on a basic human experience, that is precisely the discourse and the experience that should attract intellectual curiosity (Wann, 2009, p. x).

Within this research, Singapore is an important context within which these discursive constructions took place. In particular, there are clear intersections between the cultural, political and social dimensions, and the gendered nature of migration to body size, as I show in the analysis. While the focus here is on women's experiences of migration, to which Singapore is the backdrop, its history (of colonialism), politics and society are central to the way that body size discourses are experienced. In this chapter, I critically explore the discursive production of sized bodies by utilising a trans-sizing approach. In so doing, I disrupt hegemonic monolithic discourses regarding body size and fatness, by drawing upon theories which recognise the spatiality of body size discourses and the need to bring critical attention to bodies from outside scientific and medical contexts (LeBesco, 2004).

Critical scholars are already well equipped for deconstructing the social experiences of different identities; for example, their work has been significant for questioning taken-for-granted assumptions about bodily subjectivities (Bell *et al.*, 1994; Cream, 1995b; Bonnett, 1996). In so doing, academics have attempted to question essentialising discourses that have often justified oppressive and disciplining regimes, such as racism, sexism, xenophobia and homophobia (Longhurst, 2005). As Longhurst (2005) suggests, it is somewhat surprising that a discipline, so eager to deconstruct and challenge that certain identity markers (such as race and sex) are biological, fixed and essential, has granted body size and shape limited academic inquiry. I suggest that this lack of engagement with body size and shape as a focus for geographical research, is in part due to dominant 'medical' and 'common-sense' understandings of fatness as bad, which pervade dominant ideas surrounding fatness.

So far, work that has deconstructed dominant understandings of body size and health, and explored its embodied subjectivities, has mainly taken place within Fat Studies. Despite a burgeoning literature on critical studies of body size (and increasingly so from within critical geography), much of this work is predominantly focused on Anglo-American perspectives (Cooper, 2009). By trans-sizing, I draw upon this critical work, but focus on the significance of transnational perspectives, and

specifically, within the context of Singapore. By accounting for transnational perspectives I seek to ‘deconstruct the discourses’ (Brazier and LeBesco, 2001, p. 1) and recognise ‘culture’s grip on the body’ (Bordo, 2003, p. 17). This chapter is about power; what happens when people move across borders – national, social, cultural and political – and the ways we talk about this.

In this chapter, I explore the discursive production of expatriate women’s bodies in Singapore within the context of global narratives about body size through a study of expatriate women who live in Singapore. The gendered nature of body size and health discourses are forefront to the analysis here, where Singapore provides the context that I situate the women’s reactions. I begin with a review of literature regarding geographies of health, the body, and discourse. Within this, I establish the significance of medicalisation and governmentality. I argue that networks of power are integral to the way that body size is experienced and conceptualised. In the second part, I examine the experiences of cross-cultural discourses surrounding body size and the performances, narrations and embodiments of everyday expatriate experiences through empirical research with expatriate women in Singapore. I focus on four unique ways that power and discourses of health and fatness were integrated within the women’s experiences of migration. Specifically, I explore how health discourses and migration were mutually constituted and context specific. The empirical discussions are separated into four explorations of power: medical gaze, medicalisation and biopower, regulation and control, and finally, resistance and agency.

To be clear, this chapter is about discourse and how women speak about their experiences of size. In this chapter, I focus on how different discourses and gendered power relations construct and shape women’s narrations of size, and the significance of migration to this. I will then, in chapter four, explore the multiple ways that size was embodied. Although I argue that discourse is significant to how body size is discussed, I wish to pay specific attention in chapter four to the ‘fleshy materialities’ of the sized body by focusing on everyday embodiments (Longhurst, 2005, p. 251; Colls and Evans, 2009). I do not wish to distinguish between discourse and embodiment, but instead focus upon embodiment in order to attend to the multiple ways that people experience their lives (Longhurst, 1997). It is my argument throughout that body size is a significant and essential marker in the construction of expatriate identities, ripe for critical geographical interrogation; secondly, that the literature within critical studies of body size benefits from valuing cross-cultural perspectives, and through research that unpacks taken-for-granted Anglo-American assumptions about discourses surrounding

body size; and finally, that body size experiences are spatially contingent, discursively produced, relational and material. I begin with a review of literature on geographies of health, the body and discourse before moving to the empirical work.

3.2 Geographies of health

Within the last three decades, there has been a move within geography away from work on *medical geography* to studies of the *geographies of health* (Kearns, 1993; Parr, 2002; Dyck, 2003). Kearns (1993) suggests that this change is the result of a transition away from curative medical approaches, to those focused on health – ones that are firmly rooted in the relationship between space and place, and the social experiences of health and disease. Instead of the body as the main site of pathogen or symptom, and treatment or cure existing primarily within the domain of the clinic and medical authorities, geographies of health focus on the changing way that public health knowledge has come to penetrate, not just medical spaces, but also the social and cultural spaces of our everyday lives (Kearns, 1993). In so doing, medical knowledge and understandings of health have come to be embodied within individuals through the legitimisation of ideologies which seek to govern, regulate and control individual bodies and their practices (Brown and Duncan, 2002; Nye, 2003). In this chapter, I focus on the ways that medical discourses are implicit within the way people experience their bodies and how this comes to be narrated through gendered, classed and racialised discussions of body size through migration. I do so by drawing links between gendered transnational migration and the social, cultural and political context of Singapore.

In the twenty-first century, health and well-being are not just a concern for the sick or ill individual, and healthy practices (such as exercising frequently and eating well), not just curative, but essential preventive measures to mediate against the ‘risks’ of *becoming* ill, unhealthy or abnormal (Brown and Duncan, 2002). As Armstrong (1995, p. 399) suggests, the changing spatialisation of health represents ‘the realisation of a new public health dream of surveillance in which everyone is brought into the vision of the benevolent eye of medicine through the medicalisation of everyday life’. It is this concept of the ‘medicalisation of everyday life’ that is fundamental to understanding the theoretical basis for Kearns’ (1993) proposition regarding the shift in focus of work within geography on the spaces of health and medicine. However, although the significance of structural debates are hinted at within this paper, Kearns does not outline the way that a Foucauldian perspective could contribute to critiques of the geographies of health (Philo, 2000; Brown and Duncan, 2002). In the following

section, I outline how Foucault's (1973; 1975; 1981; 1988) work on the spaces of health and medicine, are influential to contemporary debates regarding body size, and how his theories of power help inform some of the analysis of body size discourse discussed here.

Foucault's work provides a useful theoretical basis for exploring the changing nature of medical spaces and how it is that everyday lives (and spaces) have come to be medicalised. In *The birth of the clinic*, Foucault (1973) traces the history of clinical medicine, thereby illustrating the ways that spaces of medical knowledge have moved from the spaces of the clinic and hospital, to everyday social spaces, bringing everyone within the medical gaze. As he states:

The medical gaze circulates within an enclosed space in which it is controlled only by itself; in sovereign fashion, it distributes to daily experience the knowledge that it has borrowed from afar and of which it has made itself both the point of concentration and the centre of diffusion. In that experience, medical space can coincide with social space, or rather, traverse it wholly and penetrate it (Foucault, 1973, p. 31).

Using this perspective, it is possible to understand how, over time, spaces outside of the clinic not traditionally associated with health have become increasingly medicalised (Armstrong, 1995). As medical and moral discourses disperse into everyday spaces, bodies are continually constructed through social and political representations of what constitutes a healthy body (Shilling, 1991). However, this is not a dichotomous relationship between healthy and unhealthy, but a continuum where there is always the possibility for bodies to become healthier (Armstrong, 1995). By entering into the social and cultural fabric of everyday life, all bodies are brought into the visibility of the medical gaze (Lupton, 1997). As Armstrong (1995) explains, using the term *surveillance medicine*, strategies that extend the spatial scope of medical knowledge (such as public health initiatives), mean that the responsibility of health no longer remains within the clinic or with the doctor, but penetrates the wider population by targeting individuals and ultimately becoming internalised.

Fundamental to the new spatialisation of health and medicalisation of space in modernity, is the ability for symptoms, signs and diseases to be constructed as risk factors (Armstrong, 1995). As such, health concerns are not necessarily about current illness, but the potential for all members of a population to *become* ill. In so doing, risk is produced through discourses, practices and institutions which, utilising 'expert'

knowledge, normalise particular bodies through population statistics (for example BMI), while at the same time position whole populations as at risk (Lupton, 1999).

Within this framing, ill-health is no longer just the product of pathogen or disease, but the result of an individual's compliance (or non-compliance) to partake in risk-minimising practices, often associated with lifestyle (Evans, 2006). Therefore, bodies are never healthy, but always at risk, and as such 'illness becomes a point of perpetual becoming' (Armstrong, 1995, p. 402). Consequently, the use of statistics to construct standardised norms about populations can be used to target particular at risk populations, by changing societal behaviours and disciplining bodies (Guthman and DuPuis, 2006). Simultaneously, as these measures target populations, they also emphasise the need for individuals to take responsibility for their own health, as part of a wider framework of neoliberal ideologies that promote individual responsibility (Nye, 2003). It is the assumed benevolence of the medical gaze that permits its deeper diffusion within society (Crawford, 1994; Lupton, 2012). By making health an issue for the individual as well as the population, practices of surveillance and control are justified in order to monitor those who deviate from the 'norm', and thus pose a problem for everyone. In order to do so, health discourses are saturated with moral representations of what is a 'normal' body, in addition to social, cultural, political and economic understandings of legitimate bodies. In this way, the medical gaze becomes internalised and reproduced as individuals discipline, survey and monitor their own bodies, but also the bodies of *others* (Crawford, 1994).

The pursuit of health as an individual goal and aspiration within many contemporary societies is fundamental to the ability of medicalising discourses to construct moral understandings about legitimate bodies (Lupton, 1993; Crawford, 1994; Rich and Evans, 2005). Therefore, in the context of migration, it is important to explore how ideas about health are employed within discussions regarding wider narratives of difference. Within this thesis, I explore how moralised health narratives are used within the context of Singapore by women to narrate their experiences of migration. As Brown and Duncan (2000, p. 373) state, 'health is never simply "health"; instead, it can easily become a means of moralising, of normalising and of regulating'. Using this theoretical approach, I explore the ways that body size and ideas about body size are saturated with moral understandings about individual responsibility that are then embodied. What is interesting here, is the ways within which these moral understandings are bound to experiences of migration within postcolonial contexts. Guthman (2009a) suggests that neoliberal governance produces individuals that must be responsible for their own

wellbeing through practices of self-discipline and control. A key demonstration of this is through the pursuit of health. She argues that, although thinness may be a poor determinant of health, it has come to be emblematic of self-control and of being a responsible citizen. Such a transition in the jurisdiction of public healthcare is characteristic of neoliberal governance, where individual responsibility and personal freedom are valued over collectivism (LeBesco, 2004). By making health the responsibility of the individual, bodies are disciplined in order to fit standardised understandings of what constitutes a normal body within the wider population.

The importance of individual responsibility and use of population statistics is highlighted in Evans and Colls' (2009) work. Using Foucault's (2004) theory of biopower, they explore how bodies are the subjects of disciplining strategies of surveillance but also regulated through standardised ideologies of what constitutes the 'norms' to which we must aspire to be (Huxley, 2007). In the case of body size, Evans and Colls (2009) explore the way that sized bodies are subjected to strategies of biopower (for example measuring BMI), through the discursive construction of obesity as a problem for whole populations. This analysis is useful in understanding the way that individuals come to monitor and measure their own health as a result of disciplining medical gazes, but also through an internalisation of how they *should* experience and regulate their bodies; what Foucault theorises as governmentality (Evans and Colls, 2009). Although it has been argued that a Foucauldian perspective grants too much power to the ability for discourses to control human experience, with little room for resistance, governmentality enables us to explore the ways that medical knowledge is embodied and practised by lay populations (Lupton, 1997; Evans and Colls, 2009; Wright and Harwood, 2009). As Foucault himself states:

Perhaps I've insisted too much in the technology of domination and power. I am more and more interested in the interaction between oneself and others and in the technologies of individual domination, the history of how an individual acts upon himself, in the technology of self (Foucault, 1988 cited in Lupton 1997, p. 103).

In his later work, Foucault's theories of power can be seen to shift from the conceptualisation of power as totalitarian, to a model through which individuals are able to reject, subvert and challenge disciplinary techniques, yet at the same time may be complicit in their own embodiment and reproduction of them (Lupton, 1997). This provides a useful way of thinking about how ideas regarding fatness and obesity have penetrated everyday lives, making individual pursuits to abolish fatness from the body

commonplace. At the same time, we can recognise (as I do later in this chapter) the multiple ways that these ideas are also resisted and rejected. In recognising the importance of people's agencies over their bodies, rather than as passive victims of power, we are as Bordo (2003, p. 23) suggests, both able to explore 'women's collusions with patriarchal culture and their frequent efforts at resistance' (p. 23). I contend that this model of power is useful to understanding how women experience their own bodies, particularly when they transgress the boundaries that they may be subjected to by moving over international borders. Critics should expand their understandings of the significance of discourse to bodies as subjects of representation and disciplinary powers, by recognising how 'bodies are produced and shaped by social and cultural processes and how this becomes real and fleshy in the body' (Hall, 2000, p. 26). I explore how the social and cultural landscape of Singapore shapes the way bodies are experienced through migration. How do these unique technologies of power become real in the bodies of expatriate women within the specific context of Singapore?

Despite criticism that poststructuralist analysis can fail to appreciate the materiality of the lived experience (Hall, 2000; Evans, 2006), I suggest that governmentality and medicalisation are useful theoretical frameworks for exploring lived experiences. In particular, how discourses around the 'global obesity epidemic' are perpetuated and embodied through networks of power in order to discipline populations and regulate individuals (Gard and Wright, 2005; Boero, 2007a; Wright, 2009). The central focus of this chapter is to explore this in context of gendered migration. As Boero (2007a) highlights, despite lacking a pathological basis, obesity is constructed as an epidemic through utilising traditional medical language, that can be seen to initiate moral panics surrounding fatness. Uniting moral and cultural assumptions about fatness with medical knowledge, obesity epidemic discourse is particularly powerful, as it is able to designate everyone as at risk of becoming obese, and to justify techniques of self-surveillance by problematising fatness for the individual as a benevolent concern for health (Boero, 2007a). Within obesity epidemic discourse, the general consensus of shared responsibility for ensuring a fit, healthy and thin population, reinforces ideas about how individual bodies should look (i.e. they should be thin), and how they must achieve this (through simplistic understandings of eating less and exercising more). However, obesity epidemic discourses do not target all individuals equally, as they cannot be separated from the spaces from which they emerge, or from the racialised, gendered and classed meanings associated with particular identities, in particular places (McPhail, 2009). As such, certain identities are

often the targets of disciplining regimes, such as those that are traditionally associated with being 'risky', for example, children (Rawlins, 2009; Evans, 2010; Evans *et al.*, 2011), different ethnic and racial groups (Herrick, 2008; Wilson, 2009) and women (Colls, 2004; Colls, 2006). By trans-sizing I explore how the narration of body size discourses is spatially contingent. As I said previously, this chapter is about power and how women talk about size; it is about how discourses of body size play out transnationally in gendered, classed, and racialised narratives in postcolonial contexts.

Women's bodies are particularly vulnerable to the disciplinary practices and surveillance of obesity discourse, as medical discourses often unite gendered ideas regarding health, with historical and patriarchal understandings of women's roles. As Giovanelli and Ostertag (2009, p. 290) state:

Self-discipline and control through time and space reflect subjectivities thoroughly infused with patriarchy, where women's bodies confer a status in a hierarchy not of their own making; this hierarchy requires constant body surveillance and maintenance, often taking form in self-disciplining practices.

This is not to suggest that women are passive subjects consumed by 'the grip' of powerful medical discourses and have no resistance to them (Lupton, 1997, p. 102), but that they are often more vulnerable to disciplining practices because of patriarchal social structures which position them as so. One critique of Foucault's (1975) work is that he fails to engender *docile bodies*, and explore the practices and structures that discipline women's bodies more so than those of men (Bartky, 1990). As Bartky (1997) reminds us, women's bodies are often subjected to greater disciplinary regimes and practices, aimed at producing bodies that are distinctly feminine. As she suggests, 'Styles of the female figure vary over time and across cultures [...]. Today, massiveness, power, or abundance in a woman's body is met with distaste' (P. 96). The ways that bodies are disciplined is clearly culturally situated. Within many societies today, fatness, particularly for women, must be removed from the body in demonstration of both morality and discipline. It has been argued that women are more susceptible to fat abjection because women's bodies are considered to be *particularly* embodied (Grosz, 1994; McPhail, 2009; Young, 2011). Although fatness is seen negatively (in many societies) for both men and women, disciplinary regimes that seek to slim, target women's bodies more – as the intersections of feminine and fatness position women as particularly marginalised (Brazier and LeBesco, 2001; Kent, 2001). It is clear that while contemporary versions of feminine and masculine identities in different cultures may be

challenged and subverted, the power of disciplining discourses to (women's) bodies is undeniable. As (Bordo, 2003, p. 166) suggests:

the discipline and normalization of the female body – perhaps the only gender oppression that exercises itself, although to different degrees and in different forms, across age, race, class, and sexual orientation – has to be acknowledged as an amazingly durable and flexible strategy of social control. In our own era, it is difficult to avoid the recognition that the contemporary preoccupation with appearance, which still affects women far more powerfully than men, even in our narcissistic and visually oriented culture, may function as a backlash phenomenon, reasserting existing gender configurations against any attempts to shift or transform power relations.

To return to Foucault (1988) above, it is clear that the power of strategies of self-control in relation to women's bodies and fatness, is in the ability and readiness of individuals to discipline their own bodies to conform to standardised and homogenous ideas of what constitutes a normal body. Through the greater medicalisation of spaces outside of the clinic, and the deeper penetration of the medical gaze into everyday life, women internalise ideas regarding how their bodies should be in ways that are culturally and historically situated, in line with patriarchal social structures. In the following section, I will explore the ways that medicalisation has contributed to the discursive construction of women's sized bodies through practices of surveillance, monitoring and disciplining regimes.

3.3 The body and discourse

In the previous section I explored the ways that bodies are discursively produced through governmentality and medicalisation. I traced the importance that networks of power have to constructing bodies as subjects to disciplinary and regulatory practices, which are in turn embodied by individuals. I now examine how these networks of power have come to shape, and are shaped by, the sized body. I do so in order to argue that discourse provides an important lens through which to understand the meanings attached to sized bodies, which is essential to exploring the fleshy materialities of sized bodies in everyday experiences of space, which I explore in the following chapter (Longhurst, 2005).

The separation of mind and body within Cartesian thought has long been critiqued by academics as problematic for privileging the mind over the body

(Longhurst, 1995; Pile and Thrift, 1995; Bondi, 1997; Johnston, 2001). In so doing, the body has often been viewed as other to the supposedly rational mind, with the body conceived as passionate, irrational and feminine (Rose, 1993a). As such, bodies must be disciplined and their spontaneity and desires controlled – through mind over matter (Bordo, 1988). This privileging of mind over body is echoed in work within geography that has tended to distance itself from the messy and ‘unruly’ body (Evans, 2006, p. 262). Perhaps, as Longhurst (2005, p. 252) suggests, ‘geographers are ... squeamish about geographies that focus on fleshy, corpulent bodies’. However, if we are to capture embodied experiences we must appreciate the body as more than just ‘a metaphor for culture’ (Bordo, 2003, p. 165) or a surface of inscription (Foucault, 1977). As Shilling (1991, p. 664, his own emphasis) suggests:

It is also necessary to allow for lived experience, for the *phenomenology* of the body. Bodies may be surrounded by and perceived through discourses, but they are *irreducible* to discourse. The body needs to be grasped as an actual material phenomenon which is both affected by and *affects* knowledge and society.

It is for this reason that I explore the discursive construction of body size by foregrounding the words and stories told to me by the women I spoke with.

Within the literature that explores body size from a critical perspective, the historical variations in regards to value given to different body sizes in different historical periods, is frequently cited as evidence of the culturally constructed nature of the sized body (Klein, 2001; Fraser, 2009). This work is an essential contribution to viewing bodies as discursively constructed, and to strengthening arguments that contemporary repulsion to fatness (within the West) is not natural but historically, culturally and socially produced.

While it may seem that our bodies are “natural” – an entity only determined by biology – in fact, both women and men’s physical bodies are also constructed by cultural ideas of what constitutes the ideal body image and this changes over time (Hesse-Biber *et al.*, 2006, p. 212).

Much of this work locates these historical variations within particular places. However, a large part of these discussions remains within the boundaries of national borders, with limited discussion of the way that space and place are integral to these constructions. In addition, research focusing on historical perspectives of body size are often limited to

variations across decades and centuries, thereby neglecting the ways through which body size experiences and discourses may vary from day-to-day (Longhurst, 2005). This is not to say that these literatures are not useful, as they are fundamental for challenging taken-for-granted assumptions regarding body size that persist in the twenty-first century. However, in order to ‘write body shape *geographically*’ (Longhurst, 2005, p. 247) it is necessary to unite these historical understandings with a geographical focus on the way that space and place are implicit in the cultural constructions and embodiments of body size. I push these debates further by trans-sizing, and by recognising these variations as bodies move transnationally into different social and cultural contexts.

Important contributions have explored the cultural contexts within which body size is understood. These provide a useful starting point within which to critique dominant medicalised approaches by focusing on the social construction of different bodies. In her work, Bordo (1988) explores how multiple, complex and often contradictory discourses surrounding body size have come to be embodied and experienced by anorexics. She suggests that far from being a failure or abnormality on the part of the individual, anorexia as it develops within a person, is ultimately the extreme embodiment of that culture – its ‘crystallization’ (p. 89). Bordo is keen to stress the importance that varying cultural discourses have within bodies, what she defines as ‘axes of continuity’ (p. 90). Importantly for her, in order to conceptualise bodies we must explore both how bodies are ‘constituted through culture’ (ibid), and also the ‘body – as experienced’ (ibid) – the lived body (which I explore in the following chapter). For Bordo, anorexia symbolises the epitome of desire to control one’s body; thinness representing the ultimate triumph of mind over matter and embodiment of cultural discourses. Her work provides an empirically engaged understanding of how governmentality and medicalisation are embodied and experienced by those situated within particular discourses, and the ramifications for/from sized bodies. Bordo’s work illustrates how the increasing prevalence of body size discourses has resulted in a rise in eating disorders and fascination with the sized body over time.

In their discussion of how young women engage in *fat talk*, Britton *et al.* (2006) suggest that increasing sociocultural pressures to conform to homogenous, standardised and often unobtainable ideals regarding women’s bodies have resulted in ‘body dissatisfaction as a normative experience’ (p. 247). They suggest how, discussions regarding body dissatisfaction and desires to look a certain way, or strategies of weight-loss and dieting, are often topics which women regularly discuss or are easily able to

articulate. Despite acknowledgement that the intersectionality of identities is fundamental to understanding how different people come to embody body size discourses, and the ways that gender, age, ethnicity, religion and social class, shape these, there has been limited interrogation into the influence that nationality, national borders and migration have to this. What happens to a person's experience of body size when they cross national borders and how do they then articulate this?

During my fieldwork it became apparent that conversations about body size were commonplace within expatriate women's discussions of their experiences of migration. For many of the women, speaking about themselves and their experiences of their bodies and body size were often imbued with embodied knowledge of sociocultural discourses regarding women's bodies and evidence of medicalisation and governmentality. However, for many of the women, migration and expatriate experiences meant that their traditional experiences of their bodies and the cultural repertoires used to narrate these, were negotiated and reconceptualised within the discursive frameworks of them as transnationals. For many of the women, it was not the corporeality of their bodies that *mattered* as much as the places – both materially and discursively – that they were situated within. I now turn to my empirical research to explore these ideas through an analysis of expatriate women's experiences in Singapore.

3.4 Migration, vulnerability and body size

So far I have examined the discursive production of bodies through a theoretical lens to highlight the significance that medicalised discourses have to the constitution of bodies and body size. To be clear, it has been my argument that experiences of body image and body size are produced through a variety of networks of power within material and discursive spaces. Bodies and body size are not purely material or biological – but spatially contingent – resulting in embodied experiences that are multiple, fluid and often changing. It is the aim of this chapter, to focus specifically on the ways that women discussed body size in order to explore the significance that discourse has to shaping ideas regarding bodies, size and health in Singapore. I now turn to the empirical data in order to explore the validity of these claims within expatriate experiences of body size.

For the majority of the women I spoke with, transnational migration marked a significant change in the way that they experienced, understood and narrated body image and body size. I begin with a quote from Beth who summarises many of these changes:

And the other side of body image – whiteness I said first, but there's also, just, being a big clumpy Western woman. In a world which seems to be [laughing] populated by tiny, petite, beautiful, perfectly groomed [interjecting] actually that is a terrible stereotype because actually still only some are like that. But you do feel very big and clumpy, [correcting] *I* feel very big and clunky. It's funny I didn't notice just how much I was feeling it until last September and we went back to Scandinavia, and changed plane in Helsinki. And I got out the aircraft in Helsinki and we spent a couple of hours in the airport and I thought [sighs – relaxed], isn't it nice be surrounded by other fat ugly people? [Laughs] With no dress sense [laughs]. And it wasn't, and actually it wasn't that I did think that they were fat and ugly, it's just that they were [trails off], I actually found them attractive in *my* way of thinking, of what is attractive, in which I can fit in as somewhere that is kind of just average. I'm just a bit, I may never be in this world [Singapore], but I'm an average looking person, acceptable, nobody runs off screaming when they see my face, it's, it's alright. Whereas here [Singapore], umm, you're different, you *know* you're different, you're being measured by a different set of standards and however much you say people aren't thinking about it [appearances] – actually they are. They're talking about it all the time. You know you see the discourse in the popular press, all the sort of bitching about appearances. Um, in the UK it's the same, people *are* commenting on people that walk by. And in the UK I just don't give a toss, I just shrug it off, because you know, because at the end of the day I know who I am there. But I don't here. Or at least I'm getting to the point now where I'm thinking I've just got to take the same attitude I get there [the UK] (Beth, 46, UK).

In this discussion, Beth summarises some key aspects of the ways that body size is constructed, produced and narrated that can be separated into two conceptual approaches to body size: the discursive production and the embodied experience. I do not wish to suggest the two are distinct as they are interrelated, however, for the purpose of this thesis I wish to focus on them separately. This chapter will consider the importance of discourse and the unique aspects of power, and chapter four will reflect on the everyday ways that body size experiences were embodied. The two are of course related.

In Beth's quote there are a number of issues that are of interest. However, for the purpose of this chapter I am particularly interested in focusing on the impact of migration to the discursive construction of body size. The quote from Beth suggests that through migration, the way that she experiences her body has changed. Not only has she transgressed a national border, but also social and cultural boundaries in the way that

she now experiences her body size. This crossing of borders exists not only physically, for example through border control and immigration checkpoints, but also by being situated across discourses in the ways that knowledge about bodies is understood. Beth's understanding of these different discourses is made most apparent by her references to Singapore as a different "world". As she explains, there is a clear divide between how she has come to understand what is attractive, "*my way of thinking, of what is attractive*" based on British and Scandinavian beauty discourses, and those that exist within Singapore: "you're being measured by a different set of standards". Additionally, this highlights how acceptance of one's body is also based on her ability to connect to other people through a shared sense of identity based on being white and Western in Scandinavia, that she cannot do in Singapore (I discuss this further in chapter five). For Beth, it is these new "set of standards" that mean that she is unable to "fit in as somewhere that is kind of just average", and to feel attractive and comfortable with herself. The importance of connecting is highlighted by her relief at feeling "surrounded by other fat ugly people", which through migration she feels she no longer is. This discussion emphasises the power of normalising strategies.

As Bordo (1993) suggests, we are surrounded by normalising messages through homogenous projections of what is considered to be a normal – and thus acceptable – type of body, with limited room for the diversity of cultural difference. Beth's desire to feel normal (even if she may not feel she can pass as normal), emphasised by her happiness at 'fitting in' in the airport, highlights the ways that biopower is able to regulate understandings of what constitutes a normal body through continued surveillance of other bodies and constant bombardment with images, discussions and projections of the perfect female body (Huxley, 2007). As Beth herself makes clear, "They're talking about it all the time. You know you see the discourse in the popular press, all the sort of bitching about appearances". The key point that I am arguing, is that although there is extreme pressure on women to look a certain way in their home countries, migration shapes the ways that bodies are experienced, not necessarily through new discourses but new ways of thinking about these discourses and experiences. Despite Beth's suggestion that she can "shrug it off in UK" as a resistance to normalising strategies, an unwillingness to participate in practices to alter her body, and as a coping strategy (Colls, 2006), it is very apparent within this discussion and throughout the interview that not feeling like she fits in in Singapore is upsetting for her. Additionally, I argue that the mechanisms that women may utilise to cope with body size discourses are altered under conditions of migration through a feeling of loss

of identity: “in the UK I just don’t give a toss, I just shrug it off, because you know, because at the end of the day I know who I am there. But I don’t here”. Furthermore, it is about her ability to connect to others that she sees as similar to herself, such as being white, Western and fat (Valentine, 2002). Within Singapore it is clear that making connections is harder, as I discuss further in chapter five.

What is important to this study is how transnational migration impacts the way that body size is experienced by women. The literature that I have reviewed above demonstrates how body size and a desire to be thin is common within Anglo-American culture. However, the significance of cross-cultural experiences has not been fully developed from a geographical perspective. I would argue that Beth’s comment; “I may never be in this world” reflects that, despite dominant representations of thinness as desirable in the UK, her ability to feel happy with herself and negotiate her body image is reliant on multiple factors. As the quote from Beth suggests, In the UK she is able to negotiate her body image by ‘fitting in’ (being surrounded by people she feels she can connect to), whereas in Singapore, her loss of sense of identity (as she suggests, by giving up her work), has resulted in her feeling less confident about her body image or able to handle the “bitching about appearances”. Many of the women reflected on the way that migration had contributed to them losing a sense of their identity, below I quote from Cassie:

You actually give up everything that was part of your identity, [inaudible] your career, you go to work and having the routine and having a purpose, and suddenly that’s all taken away, the husband continues as usual – 7 o’clock out the door, [...]. Whereas for women I think that’s all gone. So you um, yeah it’s just like everything has been ripped away. And it’s like now what have I got left? Where do I start? (Cassie, 50, Australia).

Geographers who have focused on transnationalism have been interested with the displacement of *people* and their movement across national borders (Blunt, 2007). However, despite the inherent understanding of migration as the movement of bodies across borders, the embodied nature of transnational migration has received limited academic inquiry (Dunn, 2010). The very nature of transnationalism means that it is rarely simple or easy to define. People are not transported from bounded place to another, but can be seen to live in-between nations, embracing and contesting multiple cultures and embodying hybrid identities (Mitchell, 1997). Geographical work must reflect the fluid nature of migration through nuanced understandings of the ‘friction of

distance and the sticky embeddedness of place' (Dunn, 2010, p. 7). As the quote by Cassie suggests, migration has fundamental implications to how she experiences her identity, which was echoed by many of the women I spoke with, particularly for the women who were no longer engaged in formal employment (the majority of women in my study had given up their jobs to move with their partners). However, despite feminist geographical work on the gendered nature of migration (Willis and Yeoh, 2000b; Silvey, 2004), few have explored the implications of migrant identities to experiences of body size.

For many of the women I spoke with, migration to Singapore and giving up their jobs in their home countries meant that many of the ways they understood their identity was in a state of flux, where they now needed to embark on new practices in order to construct their sense of identity and begin to deal with the new challenges that migration brought with it. Cassie's feelings were echoed by many of the women I spoke with:

You lose, yeah you lose yourself, [...]. You lose everything you were, because I guess, we all know who we are in our own little context [...]. And then to come here I just felt like that was all stripped away from me. [...] You're starting from the ground zero (Susan, 40, UK).

I was struggling with my kind of identity [...]. All the things that I felt that were my identity. I don't know, independence, working, or studying or always doing something for myself in my career. [...] I had this lack of identity, like who am I now? (Maria, 30, Mexico)

It is my argument that this loss of identity is important to how the women experienced Singapore and their emotional responses to the move. Additionally, it is central to how they understood and experienced their body size. It is important to note at this point the majority of the women I spoke with migrated due to their partner's jobs (always men).

We have already heard from Beth (on page 77) how migration and not knowing who she is impacts how she is able to deal with her body size in Singapore. I have highlighted how the gendered nature of expatriate migration has shaped how many women experienced a loss of sense of identity. In what follows, I explore how this was played out through discourses and narratives regarding body size. It is my argument that discussions of body size within gendered narrations of migration have wider implications that should be explored through geographical analysis. Body size is an

important lens through which to understand the multiple networks of power that shape gendered experiences in different places. The extract from my interview with Jane and Anita below expands this point when discussing Jane's need to 'get in shape' when moving to Singapore:

Jane: So right now because I went home to Canada for the summer and we moved and all the stress of moving. Now I'm getting back into my zone again. And I think it's control.

Jenny: Yeah?

Jane: I think that's what it's about, it's about, I have nothing else.

Anita: You can't work.

Jane: I couldn't work, you know, I can't do anything here, but I can control that [fitness and eating].

Jenny: Yeah

Jane: You know, and I think that's what it's about. You know me [to Anita], I just, I need to be in charge and in control.

(Jane, 43, Canada and Anita, age unknown, UK)

In this discussion, Jane explicitly states that for her, going to the gym and being able to change her body shape is essential for her ability to have some form of control over her life. Earlier in the discussion Jane stated: "the gym is my thing". Going to the gym and working out afford Jane the ability to maintain control over her body – one of the few aspects of her life that she believes she is able to control. Later on, Jane tells me that in addition to going to the gym, she has a cool box in which she stores all her food for each day. She does so to ensure not to eat more than she believes she should and to limit her consumption to food she considers healthy. It is not my wish to provide a psychological analysis, neither am I in a position to do so. However, what I wish to highlight is the importance that Jane, and to a much lesser extent Anita, place on the gym and working out as means to regain some control and meaning within their lives since they have moved. Such practices echo Bordo's (2003) earlier suggestion of anorexia as the embodiment of socio-cultural discourses in the West surrounding thinness as the ideal and morally acceptable body shape. I am not suggesting that Jane has anorexia, but that practices such as working out at the gym and controlling the food she consumes, affords Jane the meaning and control to her life she feels she has lost through migration (Evans *et al.*, 2004). I would argue that Jane recognises body work as a means to control her life due to the increasing proliferation of moral discourses

surrounding fatness and thinness. I suggest that Jane considers body work practices as her way to gain control due to her absorption of representations of thinness as a demonstration of control, and the ability to achieve it as success (Segal and Blatt, 1994).

The discussion with Anita and Jane demonstrates that sense of identity, independence and control are inextricably bound to the places they migrated to, in this case Singapore. Jane moved from Canada to India (where she met Anita) then China, and later to Singapore. Although she wants to, she is unable to work (legally) in Singapore due to visa regulations and employment opportunities, as they reflect:

Anita: I hate having to rely on my husband for everything. It's not that, it's not that he makes me feel that way or anything, but it's just I think that if you have always been used to working and being independent and having your own, that you can call your own, and that you *can* stand up on your two feet. When you've got to then give it all up. It's not easy.

Jane: No it's very hard.

Anita: It's kind of.

Jane: It's very hard.

Anita: I almost feel like, that I'm not, like what am I doing? Every day I'm like my life is [inaudible].

Jenny: I think in Singapore it's quite difficult as well because you're on a dependants' pass so you are immediately limited, and then just then in the way like setting up bank accounts you can't.

Anita: I can't do anything without my husband.

Jenny: Or like even phones you can't.

Jane: No you can't here.

Anita: You *literally* cannot do anything. You can't do anything without...

Jane: And that was a big shock too because you can't do anything in India. And I felt it a little bit in China but not so much, they're a little more forward. But in India.

Anita: Oh my God.

Jane: You *cannot* do anything, nobody will listen to you because you're a woman. It was horrible. I never gotten used to it. Ever. I was always ranting and raving to my husband blah blah blah.

Anita: Yeah.

Jane: And then coming here for some reason I thought.

Anita: It would be easier.

Jane: That they're a little bit more progressive here, and that it wouldn't be an issue here, but it's exactly the same here.

Anita: And I think that's because we're on dependant passes. If we were on some sort of visa pass it might be different.

Jane: I don't know.

Anita: But, when you're a dependant you don't really, you're not really technically a person.

Jane: [Laughs]

Anita: You're not really worth anything because you're not earning any money because technically you're a dependant on somebody else to, for financial stability.

(Jane, 43, Canada and Anita, age unknown, UK)

It is clear from this extract that Singapore, and in particular the legality of migration to Singapore, has been central to facilitating the situation where both Anita and Jane believe they are “not really technically a person”. As they stated to me, going to the gym and body practices were therefore a way in which to regain control and agency within their life when they “cannot do anything” like working or managing the family finances. While subtle, these narrations highlight the significance that body size and embodied practices have to gendered experiences of migration. As this extract shows, such experiences are incredibly spatially contingent, as there are differences between the women's experiences in Singapore, India and China.

The reasons Jane and Anita gave for going to the gym were threefold: Firstly, in order to get the body shape they desired (a thin one); as a way of making friends and having a community; and finally, to give them something to occupy their time with. Both Anita and Jane reflected on how they hated not working: “doing nothing? I hate it” (Anita), and as such going to the gym provided them the opportunity to get the body they wanted: “It's a complete vanity thing” (Jane), and fill the time they have as a result of not being employed. This is very much tied to Singapore's visa restrictions for partners and spouses, and companies often not wanting spouses to work. As Anita suggests “when you're a dependant you don't really, you're not really technically a person”, it is a reflection of Singapore's immigration policy, but also her lack of feeling of self-worth and identity as a result of this. Therefore, in addition to controlling the materiality of their bodies and providing themselves with activities during the day, I would suggest that for some of the women I spoke with, body work practices allowed the women to construct an identity around something other than work, and to be in control of one aspect of their life when they may not be in control of others, for example as what country they live in. It is clear from this extract that Singapore is an active

context to which these experiences are grounded within. In particular, structural differences in regards to visa access and rights thread themselves through the language the women use to articulate their experiences of migration and how they think about themselves – as dependent. Many of the women I spoke with reflected on the use of dependant as specified on their visa (which they are required to carry with them at all times) and how this impacted them negatively.

In relation to the discursive construction of body size in Singapore, the points I have highlighted are summarised by Jane as she discusses why she has a dedicated diet and fitness regime.

Yeah and I think too that, when you're an expat woman, like say you're starting over again and you lose your identity as well, there's nothing left to validate *you*. Or maybe before you had your job, now your kids grown older and you don't really have your kids anymore, your husband's moving forward in his career. You just, you don't feel like a person anymore and you start questioning like, your mortality. So what if I never accomplish anything in my entire life? Because that's where you are. I think, you know because I'm 43 and nearly 44, and I have been following my husband around and starting over, as soon as I get my hands into something it's like torn away and I start again. So today I had a job interview so I'll probably start working soon, which is great. But in three more years or however long that will be torn away from me. But this [control over her body]. You can never take it away from me. And I think for a lot of women it's something, to somehow validate you.

(Jane, 43, Canada)

Many of the women I spoke with discussed this idea of a loss of identity through migration. Although not all of them embarked on fitness and diet regimes, these did feature as practices that allowed women to gain control in their lives and fill their time. Some suggested it also enabled them to cope with feelings of guilt for not working and as a way to present themselves as responsible and working citizens in an endeavour to remove themselves from the stereotypical expatriate '*Tai Tai*' image.¹⁹ In the following section I explore further the ways that body size and health discourses were narrated through medical gaze.

¹⁹ *Tai Tai* is a Singlish term for a non-working woman that is considered to use their time shopping, eating and spending their husband's money. It is mainly used as a derogatory term.

3.5 Medical gaze

I have shown within the literature that medicalisation has influenced our understandings of thinness as desirable, and also – shaped through moral understandings – a measure of individual achievement and collective responsibility. Not only is there great pressure on women to be thin, but also to be seen as actively pursuing thinness and to look a certain way. In the literature above I have shown how Foucault's work on medical gaze has been employed by academics to explore the influence of power networks (governmentality and biopower) on the surveillance and monitoring of our own and other bodies. Using this work, I wish to review the ways that governmentality influenced the lives of the women I spoke with: I start by considering the importance of surveillance and gaze; I will then examine the impact of medicalisation and monitoring; thirdly, how this was embodied through practices of regulation and control; and finally, how these networks of power were subverted, challenged and resisted by the women I spoke with.

A central feature of Foucault's theory of governmentality is the processes through which citizens are able to govern and regulate themselves. In relation to the body and health Foucault (1973) suggests that, the expansion of the spaces of health and medicine through the penetration of medical gaze into social life is central to understanding how it comes to be that medical and moral conceptions of bodies are embodied. Employing his work, Armstrong (1995) extends this line of enquiry to suggest that it is through this gaze that everyday life is saturated with understandings of what a healthy body should be – through surveillance medicine. Central to this argument is Foucault's notion of power; rather than a hierarchical power belonging to individuals, it is dynamic, and it is all encompassing and omnipresent:

There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against himself (Foucault, 1980 cited in Bordo 1993, p. 191).

Notions of gaze were made reference to within the interviews I conducted, and for many, appeared to impact the women's own experiences of body size and migration. However, there were subtle nuances in the ways that gaze was understood and narrated by the women. Consider the three following quotes:

Ironically, when I'm on my own in my bedroom, just, myself – I feel most accepted there. I don't have that much problem with myself. It, it tends to hit me when I feel I'm in someone else's gaze (Beth, 46, UK).

It's always on the back of my head. What's he [her husband] think? I'm not worried that he's going to go out and do anything [have an affair]. I mean, you know, in the beginning when you go shopping and you buy your package [metaphor for wife], you know, it's gonna be a hard pill to swallow when 20 years down the road it's not the same package that you bought, you know. It works both ways. But in my head it's always there, thinking, I want to be fit so he's still attracted to me (Jane, 43, Canada).

There is a very significant informality when it comes to how people look and how they [expatriates] dress. It's interesting because when I said to you about, I mean it's all coffee and cake and what have you. It is, and the other thing is, over the, this period of time since I have been here [in Singapore] I have actually seen members [of an expatriate organisation] change quite a bit as well. Which is, I mean, I don't know, but, they've obviously got bigger or body shape has changed. And obviously I'm quite aware that they are engaging in these practices that I no longer engage in or try to minimise. So I could imagine potentially if you haven't got much structure, and doing these things, it's very easy to go off and do this and do that. So I'm quite glad in some ways I'm out of it because now I only have to worry about it at evenings and weekends [laughs] (Melissa, 38, UK).

These quotes represent the multiple ways that the gaze targets bodies, and how surveillance of bodies is significant to women's experiences of them. However, there are differences between the ways that the women narrated this. This underlines the argument that gaze is not hierarchical but interspersed; both embodied and (re)produced by different people, in different places and at different times. For example, the quote by Beth suggests that her experiences of body image are constructed through her awareness of other people seeing her. For Jane, her practices of body work are impacted through her concern with how her husband and others, view her body. Finally, Melissa's comment is both a product of her awareness of gaze and her own exertion of it. I will analyse these quotes in turn.

The quote from Beth is reflective of the significance that gaze has to the way that we come to experience our bodies and its discursive construction. As Beth clearly states, the way that she understands her body, its size and her experiences of it, are not

quantifiable, objective and constant but spatially contingent and relational to the spaces she inhabits (I will discuss this later in chapter five). For Beth it is this awareness of others viewing/judging her appearance, or an assumption that they may be, that impact how she emotionally experiences her body. As she explicitly states in our discussion of women's experiences of body image:

How good looking you are is about male gaze. It's always about male gaze at the end of the day (Beth, 46, UK).

It is important to note that Beth has an academic background and her use of language and analysis of body image is a product of this. Therefore, when discussing how she experiences her own body image she employs a theoretical approach to outline it. Although many of the women did not explicitly use this language, there was often an inherent awareness of gaze, and its impact on how women experienced their size was apparent. As the quote from Beth (on page 86) suggests, her experience of her body was dependant on where she was, or more specifically, whose gaze she *felt* she was under. Fundamental to this for Beth was migration to Singapore. As she stated earlier (on page 77), the intensity to which she felt she was judged changed in Singapore by no longer being surrounded by bodies she could relate to, as did her ability to "shrug it off". For many, although not all of the women I spoke with, migration to Singapore had a significant impact on their internalisation of medical gaze and often represented an increased surveillance of their bodies. As I suggested earlier, this increased awareness and surveillance can be linked to many of the women's loss of identity upon migration and awareness of difference.

As I have shown within the literature, medical gaze is increasingly important to how we experience our own bodies in everyday life and contexts outside of the clinic, as acceptable (healthy and thin) or unacceptable (unhealthy and fat). However, medical gaze is not just about health but also strongly gendered. As the second quote from Beth suggests (on page 86), the medical gaze does not target every individual body equally; gendered, raced, aged and classed relations are mapped onto bodies and are implicit in the way that gaze is embodied and experienced (Longhurst, 2000). This is again obvious in the quote from Jane (on page 86), as she states: "But in my head it's always there, thinking, I want to be fit so he's still attracted to me". Jane has a strict eating and exercise plan. Earlier in our discussion I asked her about the reasons for this and she disclosed to me that a year into her relationship with her husband he stopped wanting to

have sex with her. When she asked him the reasons for this he stated that as she had gained weight and he didn't find her as attractive anymore. Despite the fact that this was 24 years ago it has had clear repercussions for how Jane experiences her body size now (she vividly remembers it), as a product of her husband's male gaze. Therefore, although this may not be the only reason for Jane's desire to stay "tight" (it was the only reason she told me when asked), it had clear implications for how she views her own body ("in my head it's always there"). This is echoed by Beth's comment about male gaze that she expressed to me in an earlier meeting, "even when men aren't there, it's always about male gaze".

As Foucault (1980) suggests, the power of gaze is its ability to be interiorised, and for people to submit their bodies to their own and surrounding surveillant gaze without need for physical force. However, this is not simply about health. As Murray (2007) argues, it is a product of dominant ways of knowing; those that are historically and culturally derived. I would suggest it is through patriarchal social relations that women's bodies are situated not only within the medical gaze of what is considered an acceptable healthy body, but also as a product of male gaze; what is dominantly considered a sexually attractive body. For Jane it is clear that an awareness of surveillance by others (specifically her husband's), is implicit within her own surveillance of her body and the practices of regulation and control she employs. I do not wish to situate women as passive products of male gaze, and as I have argued earlier, women are often implicit in their own subjugation. What I wish to highlight is the multiplicity of factors that shape the discursive construction of expatriate women's bodies, and to explore the ways that transnational migration is weaved within these body size narrations.

The final quote that I wish to consider is that from Melissa (on page 86), and emphasises the way that people's bodies may not only be subjected to surveillance but also constituent of it. When Melissa states that she has "seen members change" and that "they've obviously gotten bigger", it is not a neutral observation but constructed through moral understandings of what is an acceptable body size and what are acceptable practices. Not only does Melissa observe the members' change in size but also the practices they engage in ("coffee and cake"). Melissa concludes that the increase in body size of the members is a product of the expatriate lifestyle for many non-working women, stereotypically characterised with consumption of 'brunches' and 'lunches'. This assumption is representative of the unproblematic way that lifestyles and body size are conflated. As Melissa suggests, getting fatter suggests 'losing control' of

one's body, a product of the lack of "structure" that many expatriate women are faced with. Melissa's comments are reflective of the wider pressures that women have to maintain thin bodies, but also to appear as productive and active bodies. I wonder if Melissa's judgement of these practices would be as harsh had the other women maintained thin and small bodies. It is important to note that Melissa is employed within Singapore, so when she states that she is glad "I'm out of it", she is commenting on how she no longer engages in expatriate activities during the day. Throughout the discussion it was quite obvious that Melissa was somewhat dismissive of expatriate women who didn't work and the 'ladies of leisure lifestyle'. In Melissa's comments there are clear moral connotations about expatriate activities and the lack of control that she believes the women demonstrate by partaking in them. She stated later that as she works she now "only has to worry about the weekends". It is clear discourses of control are significant to how she thinks about herself and her body. By surveilling her own body and those around her she is inherently aware that she too is the subject of the same gaze. In the following section I explore how the medical gaze is spatially contingent and taken up by women.

3.6 Medicalisation and biopower

It has been my argument throughout that a central aspect of the proliferation of moralised understandings of fatness as bad is through the medicalisation of everyday life and spaces. I do not wish to make comment on whether fatness and obesity pose a threat to global populations (like much of the work on body size). Instead, I will explore the ways that this medicalisation contributes to the construction of women's bodies. What is important is the extent that medicalised discourses surrounding fatness (as bad, unhealthy and unattractive), are influential to women's everyday lives, often with negative consequences (Curtis, 2008; Hopkins, 2008). In the following section, I suggest some of the ways that medicalisation was apparent within the interviews and how this contributed to mechanisms of biopower in relation to body size. Almost all of the women I spoke with made comment in some way that reflected the medicalisation of spaces outside of the clinic and of everyday social life, using biopolitical strategies to do so:

According to the BMI, my minimum BMI, and that's the Caucasian BMI if you want to call it that. Actually they reckon seven and a half, seven stone nine pounds. And I thought, I'm aiming for the middle here not the bottom, the middle. And

where I'm at now weight wise I've still got 48 lbs. to lose, and I've accepted that for whatever that is but I can't see it (Melissa, 38, UK).

So they [Singaporeans] look really skinny, but they're actually, they've got really high cholesterol, diabetes rates here are through the roof, heart disease is through the roof, because of just the type of food they're eating (Susan, 40, UK).

The above quotes signify the ways that medical knowledge has moved from the spaces of the clinic, into everyday lives. As Parr (2002) suggests, these comments reflect the rise in medical knowledge within our lives, not as passive recipients but as active 'self-made corporeal experts' (p. 245). What is interesting about these quotes is how casual and normative it is to discuss health and simultaneously consume and produce discourses that shape our understanding of what health is. Within the interviews, and during my time as an expatriate within Singapore, references to medical knowledge were frequent. However, it is important to note that although definitions of health and medical knowledge are often taken to be objective, scientific and value-free, they are always derived through cultural assumptions and perceptions (Murray, 2007). As the above quotes suggest, the knowledge that they have absorbed is very much situated from a particular perspective. In the case of the two quotes above, a British conceptualisation of what is healthy.

It is clear from the comments by Melissa and Susan that their understandings of health and medical knowledge are specific to them as Western, or more specifically, British – and in Melissa's case, "Caucasian" bodies. As such, what they consider to be healthy is relative, not only to Western discourses of health, but in relation to other non-Western bodies in Singapore. In the interview with Melissa, she discusses what her target weight is, and how she has determined this – based on using the BMI chart for her height. However, as she states, her calculation of BMI is based on a "Caucasian" table for Western bodies. Earlier in the interview Melissa discusses finding out that there is a difference between "Caucasian" and "Asian" BMI tables: "The BMI calculator is different for Asia and it was the first I'd bloody heard of it [...]. And actually when you look at the BMI it has changed". Her conception of health is therefore situated within her understanding of her body as white and Western but also now in the context of Singapore. It is clear that she is frustrated that there are variations. However, despite being aware of the flexible and constructed nature of BMI, Melissa's unproblematic use of it as a guide for her own body is symptomatic of homogenising

health discourses which normalise thin bodies as ideal, often with negative repercussions for those that cannot obtain them.

In discussing the variations in BMI tables for Caucasians and Asians, there is the implicit suggestion that health is flexible, subjective and geographical; however, only through polarising medical discourses on the assumed differences between what is healthy for white bodies and for Asian bodies. Instead of therefore, recognising that BMI charts cannot provide a definitive assessment of one's health and acceptable body size as it is clearly constructed and varies between bodies (although clearly only Asian and white bodies it would seem), Melissa uncritically uses it to determine her own 'goal weight' – "I've accepted that", while simultaneously cementing her understanding that there are biological differences between Asian and white bodies and the healthy size for them. Her use of it is not completely uncritical however; when she states "but I can't see it" she explains that "so I'm aiming for something that I don't know what actually looks like or feels like". Melissa is aware that BMI is problematic because "people carry their weight differently". She is also aware that losing 48lbs to put her in the middle of the 'healthy' BMI band may not look or feel right on her. Yet again, despite this she aims for it anyway and throughout the discussion it becomes increasingly obvious that reaching this weight – or not being able to – is a lifelong struggle for her ("I've been on a journey"). The use of medical knowledge like this was apparent within many of the women's discussions of health. I suggest that the increasing medicalisation of everyday life creates greater salience for medical knowledge within people's lives, yet simultaneously is able to construct and project itself as objective, scientific and absolute.

From a trans-sizing perspective, it is important to recognise how these ideas are grounded within particular spaces. In the case of discussions of health and body size (which are often conflated) in Singapore, they were often situated within the context of migration. As the quotes above suggest, this was often done through racialised and cultural ideas regarding different bodies and health. Critical work on body size has highlighted the extent to which meanings attached to different body sizes has changed through different historical periods and cultures (Bordo, 2003). A trans-sizing perspective shows the extent to which places are integral to ideas regarding body size, and as such its discursive and constructed nature. It is clear from Melisa and Susan's comments that through migration to Singapore, they read their bodies and those around them in different ways. As such, their dominant ideas regarding health – as not necessarily indicated by weight – are challenged, but not the way they seek to discipline

their own bodies (they both wish to lose weight for what they suggest are ‘health reasons’). Within the context of Singapore, how they narrate experiences of size are often through othering discourses based on social and cultural ideas regarding different bodies. I explore this further in chapter five.

Furthermore, it has been outlined within the literature the ways that within strategies of surveillance and medicalisation, bodies are regulated through standardised ideas of what is considered a normal body (Huxley, 2007). Wright (2009) argues that strategies of biopower not only place individuals under surveillance, but increase their own monitoring of their bodies through the knowledge they have gained regarding obesity and lifestyle. Foucault suggests that strategies that seek to regulate and control individuals through the use of population statistics, define what is normal and what may be deviant. This is clearly indicated by discussions of BMI. However, I suggest that by engaging a trans-sizing approach, expatriate articulations highlight the variations in the ways that mechanisms are used.

There was a clear framework for many of the women of what constituted a normal body, and there was often reference to using statistics to determine health. However, I would argue that in the expatriate case, the population used to compare individual bodies is not so clear-cut. As the quote by Melissa suggests the biopolitical strategies and monitoring of health and weight that the women employed often utilised averages and norms from their home countries. Additionally, although there was evidence within the interviews that many women did employ biopolitical methods of surveillance and monitoring of their individual bodies, a Foucauldian analysis would suggest that such methods contribute to the control and regulation of whole populations through the collection of statistical data, for example national health surveys. In fact, as expatriates, it is unlikely that individuals will be monitored in this specific way and contribute to national averages, as it is unlikely that data will be collected for those living outside of the UK or those that are citizens of Singapore. I am not debating the clear evidence that biopolitical strategies were employed by some of the women I spoke with: such as recording BMI, measuring weight, counting calories and using dress sizes. However, I suggest that within the transnational context, population monitoring is not so straightforward, as they are situated in multiple and often conflicting discourses of what is an acceptable and normal body and what is considered to be healthy.

3.7 Thinness and dieting/Regulation and control

I have been eager to highlight the importance of surveillance and monitoring to shaping the regulation and control of bodies, in particular, women's bodies. Fundamentally and inextricably linked to this is the way that moral discourses are implicit to the ways that we construct understandings of what constitutes a normal body and the mechanisms needed to ascertain it. As Simonsen (2000, p. 7) persuasively argues:

The question of being slim and healthy has almost become a matter of morality, and failure to fit the ideal is seen as an indication of defective self-discipline and a lack of mental, physical and social control.

Throughout the discussions it became clear that the ideal body, and the pursuit of it, carried a moral imperative. As Simonsen suggests, the thin body, and the activities considered as the mechanisms for achieving it, reveal societal attitudes of what is a good or bad body. How we discuss and experience our bodies, as sized, exercising or dieting (or not), is not just an individual choice, but a reflection of the ways that morality and health are intertwined. As such, how we think, feel, treat, experience and talk about our bodies reaffirms the moral and cultural discourses that shape our understandings of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle and body – and thus a good one (Conrad, 1994). As I have highlighted within the literature earlier (Guthman, 2009b), regardless of whether thinness is a determinant of health or not, for many it is the epitome of self-discipline, control and of a responsible citizen. Within this section I will briefly explore some of the ways that discussions of health employed moral understandings of thinness as good, and the ways that regulation and control were maintained through these discourses. I begin with three quotes:

Oh terrible, I've been trying and struggling and struggling [with weight]. Because I have put on weight like most expats have, that come. Even though we [her and her husband] walk everywhere and we still get groceries, I've gained weight because at home I never ate rice, I never ate noodles, I never ate anything white, I never ate fried – *ever*. Everything was steamed. But here "*oh let's just go grab something*". Okay, right, char kway teow, that's fried. So yeah of course I gained weight, and um so I feel like, terrible, that's another reason I'm really worried to go home because my jeans don't fit (Leigh, 43, Canada).

I know that if I take, if I do this the consequence is this [gaining weight], and I know how to manage this now. I need to exercise more or I need to, not more, but

be consistent. And then, um, eat healthier, so because here I didn't take care or didn't eat healthy and now I know that I have to do it. It's like yeah. I know what to do about it, it's not that I'm lost and I don't know what to do. No I *know* what I have to do, I have to do it! (Maria, 30, Mexico)

Because you can't pick and choose where the weight comes off. You know, so I have to go around it and tone up, exercise, eat well. But I suppose using the mind frames and principles that it's always gonna come back up again really. I've got to live for the moment as well but, on a, just little bit at the back there thinking if I live for the moment now, and I don't want to get too comfortable and complacent with that either, because that could motivate me to not move forward which is actually my goal to move forward, moving forward is the scales going down, the number going down (Melissa, 38, UK).

It is clear from these three quotes that there are strict divisions between what is considered to be a 'good' approach towards maintaining the body and what is considered to be a bad one. Overarching this of course, is the idea of fatness and obesity as deviant (Schur, 1986; Maurer and Sobal, 1999). Ultimately, exercise and weight loss – as mechanisms of regulation and control – are 'pathways to body redemption' (Conrad, 1994, p. 386). It is not surprising that such views are expressed if we consider the continuous bombardment of anti-fat rhetoric within popular discourse, and the dominant and uncritical assumption that increased weight is a sign of moral laxity (Campos *et al.*, 2006). A key way that moral assumptions about body size were articulated in the interviews, and the mechanisms used to control it, was through discussions of eating and consumption practices. Eating is not merely a necessity to survive but a means of embodying and performing moral cultural representations to us and others of acceptable bodies and lifestyles; it is inherently spatial. As Valentine (1999a, p. 331) suggests, 'through the act of eating we imagine ourselves both spatial (fat or thin) and as positioned in social space (good or bad person, class, sexually attractive)'. This was clear within many of the discussions. However, although studies have explored the moral connotations that people apply to eating practices (Conrad, 1994; Valentine, 1999a), few have focused on the implications that migration has to these conceptualisations.

Within the above quotes, clear moral lines are drawn in the ways women speak about eating and exercise. There is an assumption that I and they share common understandings of what the word 'healthy' symbolises, and what we both recognise as

good and bad practices. While the countries of origin for the women I spoke with varied, the spread of monolithic discourses regarding fatness as bad meant that for many of the women as expatriates, health was often represented through homogenous understandings and othering Asian consumption and lifestyles as deviant. What is clear is that “walking”, “exercising” and to “eat healthy” is good, and that “hawker centre food is *not* healthy” (Emily, 31, UK).²⁰ What is interesting is the impact that migration has had to these health discourses. Eating healthily is dichotomously constructed against bad eating practices through orientalist constructions of Asian lifestyles as unhealthy. For example, as Leigh states: “I’ve gained weight because at home I never ate rice, I never ate noodles, I never ate anything white, I never ate fried – *ever*. Everything was steamed.” Not only does she polarise eating healthily against eating badly, with the consequences of feeling “terrible”, she considers her weight gain as a consequence of living in Singapore where food is frequently “fried” (bad) and not “steamed” (good). Discussing Singaporean food as unhealthy was common within my interviews and my life as an expatriate, consider the quote from my field diary.

Extract from field diary

Today Charlotte [my French housemate] came into my room to tell me that she thinks her hair has started to fall out. She said it was because of all the MSG that they [Singaporeans] put in the food. We both frantically started Googling the ‘effects of MSG’ and even decided to purchase shampoo that would help prevent hair loss. We have both decided that we should start buying groceries more, to try and be healthier and not eat so much Hawker food.

Central within this extract and the quotes, is our shared understanding as expatriates of Asian food as unhealthy. I frequently had discussions about the use of MSG within hawker food and conversations about Singaporean food as unhealthy were frequent.²¹

It is recognised that the moral connotations of eating can cause it to be ‘experienced as invasive, intrusive and contaminating’ (Valentine, 1999a, p. 334). Furthermore, I would argue that within expatriate experiences about food

²⁰ It is important to note that hawker food is a central facet of Singaporean culture and can be seen to embody particular cultural understanding about Singapore’s heritage. For example, its history of immigration, the multiple ethnic and religious groups and the significance food has among Singaporeans. It is commonly understood that the first thing a Singaporean will say to you upon meeting is to ask if you have eaten yet.

²¹ MSG or Monosodium glutamate is a flavour enhancer and food additive. Its use is frequently the topic of debate within the British media.

understandings are forged through cultural constructions of Asian lifestyles as deviant. Therefore, it is commonly understood that in order to achieve and maintain thinness you must exercise control, moderation and regulation. Not doing so can have consequences such as shame and guilt, as Maria states, it is a “need” and a “must” to lose weight and to eat healthier. Crawford (1994) suggests that these comments reflect the guilt that is often experienced in not conforming to standardised norms of acceptable practices that are inherent within the language we use to talk about eating and health. I would also argue that these feelings of guilt are reflected in the way some of the women discussed the abundance of ‘unhealthy’ food in Singapore – often discussing it as tempting and hard to resist – thus undermining their attempts to exercise control and modesty:

Food is the focus here. You know it has a lot of symbolic meaning for everything. And there is something completely wrong with you if you don’t engage with it on some level or another. And obviously I try to avoid it and you know, not opt out but I tend to try and control my food a little bit more.

(Melissa, 38, UK)

What is interesting is the way that Singapore and Singaporean culture is often constructed – through a process of othering – as deviant. For many of the women, dieting, eating healthy and exercising can be seen as mechanisms of regulation and control, but also discussed as ways to save and limit their engagement with the temptations of Singapore. Many of the women discussed the negative impacts of “being in the holiday mode” (Sophie, 35, UK), when they first arrived in Singapore, characterised by eating what they want, drinking alcohol and not exercising. Despite wanting to enjoy the pleasures of living in Singapore, and living “for the moment” (Melissa page 86), staying in the “holiday mode” and becoming too “complacent” (Melissa) and lazy were ultimately considered negative and a sign of lack of control, represented through the body and its size. Of course, not all of the women I spoke with discussed food and exercise in this manner and this is clearly only representative of some of the many body size discourses that impact expatriate experiences of body size. However, what is important to recognise is how migration contributed to ways that body size was narrated, and within the context of Singapore, the significance that cultural ideas regarding food and difference impacted the women’s experiences of their bodies and Singapore. In the next section I will explore the ways that many of the women challenged, subverted and rejected dominant discourses surrounding body size.

3.8 Resistance and agency

I have argued throughout this chapter the multiple ways that body size experiences are discursively constructed. In so doing, I have explored the influence of power networks and the dominance of ideologies that perpetuate the idea of fatness as bad. However, it has not been my intention to portray expatriate women as the passive victims of these networks, or as a homogenous group. Instead, it is hoped that I have critically reflected on *some* of the dominant ways that body size discourses shape experiences, and the multiple ways this was narrated to me within the context of Singapore. In the final part of this chapter I would now like to briefly explore some of the ways that discourses were challenged, subverted and ignored. I will do so by focusing on extracts from three of the women I spoke with. It is important to remember of course that throughout all the interviews, body size was reflected on in ways that were contradictory, and it is my belief that it is the contradiction within women's experiences that make these discussions interesting – and ultimately our opportunity to deconstruct and challenge discourses.

One way that I would suggest disciplining networks and the concept of the docile body was challenged, was through the way that for many of the women, body size and my questions about it, were ignored or discussed in a blasé manner. It could be argued that indifference to discussing body size in-depth may represent the highly personal nature of the topic, and the women's intimate, often embarrassing and sometimes upsetting experiences of it. While simultaneously showing the barriers that exist within the interview setting – and I am sure for many this was the case. However, I would also suggest that it highlights the ambivalent relationship that many women have to their body size (Bondi, 2004). The discursive production of body size is not fixed, it is multiple, contradictory and temporally and spatially reliant (Longhurst, 2005). I do not wish to argue that the experiences I have shown above are true for all women, but neither are they necessarily true for those women at all times and in all places; they are subjective. What is important is the way that body size often did not factor as a significant everyday experience or was discussed as not particularly relevant. Below is Becky's response to my question about what she thought the impacts of migration to Singapore might be to young girls' experiences of body image:

I don't know I guess, I haven't really, I'm probably to some extent the wrong person to ask that. I just don't have time to, do you know what I mean? my life is, so like, I don't know, I'm not particularly, I don't particularly care whether I look

the part I'd rather get the exercise and be dripping in sweat when I get to school, than be like the rest of the mothers, who all look absolutely imac [interrupting] I mean they do, they all look absolutely immaculate.

(Becky, 35, UK)

What is important here is Becky's inability to answer the question. While her hesitation and repetition reflect her efforts to, her ambivalence towards body image is clear. This is not to say that Becky doesn't care what she looks like, neither does it signify that she is not aware of dominant discourses regarding her body (her discussion of the other 'immaculate' mothers may be an example of this). Instead, she states quite frankly, that she has things she considers more important to be concerned about than her appearance. Becky has two young children, and due to her husband's job, frequently must care for them on her own. As such, Becky suggests she doesn't "have time to" worry about her appearance to a certain degree. Earlier in the interview Becky did discuss the difficulties of finding clothes in Singapore and her negative experiences of it, but much of the discussions were brushed aside as not important. What I think is important therefore, is to remember that although dominant body size discourses are pervasive, they are not totalising, and there are frequent opportunities to resist, adapt and often ignore them. What I wish to argue is that how we think about, experience, feel and narrate our body size is dependent on the places we are in, and in the case of migration – an important and often overlooked facet of migrant identity.

The second point I wish to make in regards to the multiple and contradictory ways that women discussed body size experiences is through their focus on body size and strength. It is not my intention to suggest that women only engage with exercise practices to lose weight as a form of disciplining the body and conforming to normalised and sexualised ideals regarding women's bodies. Consider the following two extracts:

It's more focusing on what your body can do, rather than how it looks. Example like yoga – now I can bend a lot. Now that I'm running again, [...]. But now I'm jogging again, and now I think ok I, I'm not skinny, and I don't have like really this. I have big thighs, I know, and legs, but now when I watch them I like them [smiling] because I feel oh I could never jog like 5k so easily, like two, three times a week, so when I look at them I think it's good because now they are able to run, and in the past I didn't see that I saw "*aww they're so fat*" (Maria, 30, Mexico).

Jenny: What is the sort of goal of exercise for you?

Emily: Erm I mean I would say, I suppose initially it was kind of weight and keeping my, and weight loss just generally, looking good, but *actually* I've got quite into improving my fitness levels. Because I think I've felt a real difference [...]. and I've got quite into running as well. So I suppose my goal at the moment is *is* sort of body, physic and stuff but it also, I can feel myself getting a lot fitter and I like that (Emily, 31, UK).

These two quotes highlight some of the ways that exercise provided a means for women to gain strength and improve the capabilities of their bodies. For some of the women, such as Emily, although exercise may have initially been a method to lose weight, many of the women were encouraged by the improving capabilities of their bodies to, for example, run further, become more flexible or their increased strength.²² It can be argued that these bodies are merely representative of the disciplinary regimes of patriarchal capitalism (Dworkin, 2001). However, I would argue that it can also symbolise women's ability to undermine the patriarchal dominant ideology of women as passive and weak (Johnston, 1996). Developing physical fitness through exercise offers the opportunity for many women to embody feelings of competence and empowerment (Liimakka, 2011). As Dworkin (2001, p. 335) suggests, 'many women have experienced sport and fitness as sites of power and agency where they have rejected narrow constructions of femininity and where they can embrace physical power and independence'.

Women's relationships to their bodies are clearly not one-dimensional and forged through complex social relations and embodied experiences (Wright *et al.*, 2006). Their narrations are also place specific. Some women commented within the interviews that their larger size and height, in relation to Singaporeans, provided them with the ability to get through busy crowds on the MRT (Mass Rapid Transit) and push past people. These comments were often reflected on humorously. Many women suggested that they enjoyed being larger because it allowed them to challenge the crowds of people on the MRT. Many suggested that they felt that Singaporeans were rude because of the practice of '*Kiasu*', and as such by 'standing their ground' and using their bodies they were able to successfully get on and off public transport or beat

²² I do not wish to suggest that those wishing to lose weight are the passive victims of dominant discourses but focus instead on how narratives of body size are multiple and often open to contestation.

other people that were trying to do so.²³ In such cases, the women's bigger size relationally invoked a particular type of physical capital needed to get onto busy MRT trains or to challenge the 'rudeness' of those that would not move out the way when walking. These experiences hint at the multiple ways that we experience and embody size, and often the functionary nature of it. However, I would also suggest that these discussions reflect the production of bodies and their size as a reflection of hierarchy and status (Shilling, 1991). Discussions of 'barging' people out the way were made humorous by the women's satisfaction that their bigger bodies – although perhaps not as attractive as the 'skinny' Singaporean 'girls' – physically dominated them. It is important to note that such instances were always discussed where the person being barged was Singaporean, not other expatriates. Thus, the physical capital and strength of the women's bodies were constructed through a relational experience of size and through othering processes that constructed Singaporeans as rude and as lesser, both socially and materially. Additionally, exercise and physical strength can highlight the challenging nature of some women's engagement with their body size. It is important to note that the materiality of bodies is still important, and despite feeling empowered by their strength and capabilities of their 'bigger' bodies, it was often necessary that those bodies be muscular, tight and firm. Additionally, these discourses still reduce bodies that are not capable of fitness and strength to marginalised positions, such as those bodies that are not physically able to exercise or do not have the resources to engage in these practices (Hall, 2000).

The point I am making is that women are not the passive victims of body size discourses, but their experiences of them are multiple, contradictory and ambiguous. Body size discourses are a significant to the way that women experience their size and migration but they are not totalising. Discourses do shape the construction, representation and narration of body size but these are regularly disrupted, ignored and challenged by women day-to-day and in different places. To be clear, I have demonstrated throughout the significance that these discourses have to expatriate sized experiences, but hopefully this section has shown also how discourses are open to negotiation. Understanding the influences of discourses is significant to exploring the impact they have to women, but part of this is our ability to deconstruct and challenge them.

²³ *Kiasu* is a Singlish and Hokkien term used to define a 'fear of losing'. I often came across the term during my research when people discussed an unwillingness to let others go before them on public transport and often encounters with 'barging' on platforms.

3.9 Concluding remarks

The key focus of this chapter has been an exploration of the multiple ways that networks of power – in particular dominant ideas regarding health and fatness – shape discourses regarding body size, and how they are taken-up, embodied and narrated by expatriate women in the context of migration in Singapore.²⁴ Specifically I explore how health and body size discourses intersect with gendered, classed and racialised narratives of migration. It has been clear throughout that dominant ideas regarding fatness as bad and the medicalisation of everyday spaces has clear implications to how women experience their identities as expatriates and their bodies. It is my argument that by looking at migration, the centrality of place to body size discourses is overtly emphasised, calling attention to the ways that bodies and body size are not just material but spatially contingent and as such multiple, fluid and often changing. In the context of migration to Singapore, moral understandings regarding what constitutes legitimate and healthy bodies are bound to experiences of difference within postcolonial contexts. Using the words and meanings of the women I spoke with, I have analysed how discourses are significant to shaping and (re)producing expatriate women's experiences of body size in three ways:

Firstly, governmentality and biopower provided a useful lens through which to explore the ways that medical knowledge has come to be embodied by individuals and the mechanisms women used to do so (for example BMI). Specifically, I focused upon the ways that medical and male gaze were internalised and reproduced by women, contributing to how they disciplined, surveyed and monitored their bodies in line with dominant ideas regarding fatness and obesity as bad. It was clear within the analysis that social spaces were penetrated with medical and moral understandings of how women's bodies *should* be, and it was clear that for many, migration to Singapore often contributed to an increase in surveillance of their bodies.

Secondly, I highlighted the ways that for many women, migration to Singapore contributed to feelings of a loss of sense of identity, which in turn were embodied through practices of body work and the mechanisms they used to manage their feelings towards their bodies and size. The key point I have made is that while there is pressure on women in their home countries to discipline their bodies (often to be thin and to be seen as actively pursuing thinness), moving to Singapore often limited their potential to

²⁴ When referring throughout to *dominant discourses* regarding body size I am talking about narratives in which fatness and obesity are viewed negatively both in popular and medical discussions. These are often referred within the literature on size as Western discourses. While these discourses are not totalising, anti-fat rhetoric is increasingly a global phenomenon.

deal with these pressures. In particular, I highlighted how visa regulations marked many women as dependants, and the ways that this sense of loss of identity many articulated upon migrating, made coping with the pressure of conforming to particular heteronormative ideas regarding their bodies harder.

Thirdly, I have been keen to highlight throughout the ambivalent relationship women have to their bodies and the networks of power that shape these, contributing to multiple, contradictory and temporally and spatially contingent identities. In so doing, I have shown the subjective nature of body size and how the experiences highlighted here are not true all the time, neither are power networks totalising and final. In the final section I emphasised several ways that women subverted, rejected and challenged discourses emphasising their competency and strength. Indeed women's relationships to their bodies are not one-dimensional but dynamic and forged through complex social relations in place. By bringing together critical work on discourse, medicalisation and body size, and empirical research on expatriate women, I have highlighted the importance of place, and the necessity for work on migration and critical studies of body size to *move over borders* and recognise the centrality of body size discourses in people's experiences of different places.

I have been mindful throughout that focusing on discourse can lead the body to be marginalised from accounts. As Smith (1997, p. 504) states: "writing about music is like dancing about architecture" (504), perhaps the same can be said for talking about bodies. Discourse, may not indeed be the best way to capture experiences, but it is a start; it is a lens through which to explore materiality, it is a way through which to understand embodiment, and it is means through which to challenge it. I have felt it important within this chapter to explore discourse as significant to how people come to experience size, and the unique aspects of power that shape it. By employing a trans-sizing approach I challenge the totality of medical knowledge through my recognition of space – and in this case transnational space – as a lens through which to explore body size's discursive construction. Indeed, I have found that these discussions with expatriate women overtly highlight the spatial context of body size. However, discourse is only one aspect of these experiences. It is therefore the aim of the following chapter to explore the embodied experiences of body size – the multiple, conflicting and subjective nature of it.

Chapter Four: The Embodied Experiences of Sized Bodies

4.1 Introduction

In Asia I feel colossal and find myself continually clenching my body in an attempt to take up less space, but in the Pacific Islands, surrounded by larger-bodied people, I feel more relaxed (Longhurst, 2005, 253).

How we think about, feel and experience our bodies is not fixed. In fact, our feelings and how we come to understand our bodies and our size are in a constant state of flux through space and time (Nast and Pile, 1998; Longhurst, 2001). Body size is subjectively experienced and embodied in space as we move through, negotiate and embody the social, cultural, political and physical world (Lupton, 2013). At the same time, our bodily experience and size are not only constituted spatially and temporally, but through the complex and dynamic intersections of our own identity markers that shape how we come to embody and experience our size every day, and through relational interactions with those around us (Hopkins, 2008; Hopkins, 2012). What I will argue throughout this chapter – and as the quote above suggests – is that transnational migration, in this case to Singapore, impacts the way people come to experience their sized identity. In this chapter, I explore how size is embodied in different ways, for example: through relational encounters with different people and changes to the way that they are able to connect to others; through material encounters with the built environment and consumption practices; and the negotiation of discourse that perpetuates anti-fat rhetoric and the thin ideal.

In chapter three, I explored how women discussed and narrated their experiences of size, appreciating the ways that discourses were significant to their construction and narration of experiences of body size upon migrating to Singapore. Recognising these unique aspects of power I teased out some of the implications that medicalisation and biopower have to expatriate women's experiences of body size. However, I recognise the limits of discourse, and the need to engage with the messiness of the material body so as not to marginalise embodied – 'real' – experiences within my analysis (Colls, 2002; Longhurst, 2005; Evans and Colls, 2009). Bodies are not entirely produced through discourse; they are not inanimate objects waiting for inscription (Turner, 1984). Instead, I focus here on embodiment in order to recognise bodies as central to experiences and everyday perceptions (Entwistle, 2000). I understand the importance of

discourse to culturally inscribe bodies, but also people's active involvement in the reproduction of discourses through embodied practice (Bourdieu, 1984). Both chapters focus on the (discursive) narration of women's expatriate experiences. However, while chapter three is concerned with the structures, discourses and networks of power that shape these narrations, this chapter explores the lived experience of bodies; the day-to-day ways that bodies are implicated within migration experiences, highlighting the body's position as central to human experience (Merleau-Ponty, 2002). I focus here on some of ways that the discourses discussed in chapter three were embodied and experienced by the women I spoke with, so as to account for the 'fleshy materiality' of bodies (Longhurst, 2005, p. 6). I recognise the overlap between discourse and embodiment, but have chosen to separate these discussions in order to focus here specifically on the importance of embodiment.

In an earlier paper (Lloyd, 2013, p. 123), I argued that 'geographical engagements with the sized body and work on transnational migration have had limited engagement with one another'. Despite important work within studies of transnationalism that account for embodied experiences of migration and mobility (Dunn, 2010), and challenging critical work within Fat Studies (Longhurst, 2005; Colls and Evans, 2009; Cooper, 2010), there has of yet, been little work that has recognised the importance of connecting these two areas. Within this research project, migration had significant implications for the way that women experienced, embodied and performed their sized identities. In order to account for these experiences, and to argue that body size is an important identity marker that geographers must begin to take account of (Longhurst, 2005), this chapter will focus on the embodied experiences of size for expatriate women within Singapore. Specifically, I address the everydayness of body size, by focusing on some of the practices and places within which expatriate women's sized identities were constituted, and the implications this had for how they discussed the embodied and emotional implications of migration.

The aim of this chapter is to explore the embodied experiences of expatriate women's body size in Singapore, within the context of everyday spaces of migration, and the intersections of different identity markers. Following from the previous chapter, I develop critical work on body size, by discussing the significance of popular and medical discourses of body size, to the way that these women felt and embodied their sized experiences within the context of Singapore. As in chapter three, discourse provides an important contribution to how size is lived and cannot be separated from how size comes to be embodied. However, in this chapter I give attention to the lived

materiality of sized bodies in order to focus specifically on embodiment. While in chapter three Singapore provided the backdrop within which discourses were played out, this chapter focuses more explicitly on Singapore as an active context. I begin with a review of the literature on feminist engagements with the body, before moving to literature within Fat Studies and critical engagements with body size.

4.2 Feminist engagements with ‘the body’

Current attention to embodied subjectivities and critical geographies of body size have developed from feminist geographers’ engagements with the body in the mid-nineties, and their desire to bring bodies back in (Longhurst, 1995; Longhurst, 1997). By recognising the importance of the corporeal body, feminist geographers sought to challenge the dominance of Cartesian dualistic thought in the West, which they argued had led to the body’s invisibility within research in the social sciences (Gatens, 1992; Rose, 1993b; McDowell, 1999; Moss and Dyck, 2002). Despite this, the body remained – and still is – a highly contested concept, and the question of *what is a body?* often remains unclear (Turner, 1984; Hopkins, 2008). In addition, a desire to account for the corporeal body has often been overlooked within research due to a fear that reference to the material body may result in biological essentialism (Johnson, 1990). Grosz (1998, p. 43) explains:

By body I understand a concrete, material, animate organization of flesh, organs, nerves, muscles, and skeletal structure which are given a unity, cohesiveness, and organization only through their psychical and social inscription as the surface and raw materials of an integrated and cohesive totality.

Therefore, embodied experiences are not constructed entirely through discursive practices, but through the mutual relationship between discourses, materiality and spatiality (Little and Leyshon, 2003). It is for this reason that, following from the previous chapter on discursive construction, I explore here the multiple ways that identities are embodied and experienced through material interactions with body size and different places. As Nast and Pile (1998, p. 4) state, bodies and spaces are constructed through ‘intricate webs of social and spatial relations that are made by, and make, embodied subjects’. What it is to be a sized body relies not only on the intersections of bodies within social, cultural, relational and political discourses, but the materiality of those experiences. Invoking an embodied approach to studies of

transnationalism allows geographers to recognise, not only the significance of materiality to migrant experiences and the embodied politics of identity and difference (Blunt, 2007), but also how transmigrants' everyday experiences are shaped and constructed through 'multi-stranded social relations that link together their society of origin and settlement' (Glick Schiller *et al.*, 1995, p. 7). Before focusing on the experiences of the expatriate women I spoke with, I wish to outline the literature that has helped shaped my analysis – Fat Studies and critical geographies of body size.

4.3 Fat Studies and critical geographies of body size

As I have highlighted in chapter three, much of the dominant rhetoric that surrounds fatness in the West, is dominated by common sense and medical understandings of fatness as bad, unhealthy and unattractive (Brazier and LeBesco, 2001; LeBesco, 2004). However, despite the power of such monoliths, there have been movements across disciplines to challenge these discourses by bringing a range of voices and experiences into discussions of body size (Rothblum and Solovay, 2009; Cooper, 2010; Rothblum, 2012). I would like to turn to the literature here within the inter-disciplinary academic field of Fat Studies before focusing on the literature within critical geographies of body size. Considering the historical origins of Fat Studies, and how academics and activists have worked together, is essential to understanding the theoretical and empirical implications to work within this field, and how this has informed my own research project and the subsequent analysis.

Fat Studies is an interdisciplinary field of scholarship marked by an aggressive, consistent and rigorous critique of the negative assumptions, stereotypes, and stigma placed on the fat body (Rothblum and Solovay, 2009, p. 2).

As a field of academic inquiry, work within Fat Studies is relatively new. It has only been within the last ten years that research within the field has gained momentum, in large part due to obesity epidemic discourses which have increased in the last decade (Cooper, 2010). However, despite its relative infancy, there is already work across different disciplines that are providing enriching accounts of fatness that challenge conventional academic accounts of obesity. In 2012 the Fat Studies journal was first published, providing a forum for which to discuss fatness in a way that 'seeks to challenge and remove the negative associations that society has about fat and the fat body' (Fat Studies, 2012, online). Publications within this, have sought to explore and

research fatness and body size through a critical lens, and to begin to understand what it feels like and signifies to be fat in a fat phobic world. Much of this work is prefaced with *the West* and how within the West obesity is considered a problem (Murray, 2005; Cooper, 2009). However, few have engaged critically with the use of these terms or provided accounts from beyond the West.

Like much of academia, Fat Studies has its roots in earlier and ongoing activist movements surrounding social justice, that can be traced back to size acceptance movements within the United States (US) emerging in the sixties and early seventies (National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA) and the Fat Underground) (Rothblum and Solovay, 2009; Lloyd, 2013). In her review, Cooper (2010) highlights how previously movements to critique obesity discourse and promote more diverse and accepting positions regarding body size, had remained within the domain of activists and feminists. However, she suggests that the growing dominance of medicalisation and pathologisation of fatness (Lupton, 2013), and funding for large-scale (anti)obesity research projects, has led a small but growing number of academics to pay attention to the need to critically interrogate discussions of body size beyond homogenous scientific reports.

In addition to work by activists: queer, feminist and disability studies scholars have been fundamental to shaping the focus of Fat Studies (LeBesco, 2004; Rothblum and Solovay, 2009; Cooper, 2010). Following from research in these areas, Fat Studies scholars have politicised fatness seeking to disturb and challenge heteronormative and common-sense understandings of it. Sharing with work in queer studies, fat too unsettles and defies normative understandings of how bodies *should* look and behave (LeBesco, 2004). As Cooper (2008) suggests, the use of queer theory in studies of fatness provides a template for addressing fat oppression and movements for social justice. However, she is also wary of the limitations of aligning with other stigmatised identities, and as LeBesco (2004) argues, the many queer writers who would reject fat acceptance. Additionally, much work within this field is theoretically underpinned by earlier work by feminists seeking to bring bodies into research, recognising the importance of the corporeal body and the need to challenge its dualistic construction in opposition to the mind (Longhurst, 1995; Moss and Dyck, 2002; Lloyd, 2013). This work has argued that the Cartesian separation of mind and body has led to obesity being treated as a facet of the unruly and devious body that should be disciplined and controlled – through diet and exercise (Shilling, 2003; Evans, 2006). As such, the fat

body represents a moral failure by the individual, contributing to the stigmatisation of fat bodies.

Where earlier critical academic work has sought to challenge taken-for-granted understandings of other identity markers that were previously assumed to be fixed (for example race and ethnicity, gender, class and sexuality), work within Fat Studies is progressing our understandings of *fat embodiment*, highlighting the multiple ways that fatness is lived. In her book *Fat*, Lupton (2013) discusses the multiple ways that fatness acts as a cultural artefact. She argues that fatness is historically and socially constructed, and like other identity markers – such as gender or ethnicity – is lived and experienced through dynamic and complex discourses, relations, materialities and emotions. It is somewhat surprising then that it has not been until the last decade that geographers have recognised fatness, body size and shape as ripe for geographical inquiry. As Longhurst (2005, p. 247, italics in original) suggests, ‘it is time to write body size *geographically*’ and recognise the ‘complex spatial relations’ (ibid, p. 256) through which bodies are constituted. I turn now to the geographical literature within Fat Studies – critical geographies of body size.

4.3.1 Critical geographies of body size

I have argued throughout chapter three that there is a dominance of medicalised discourses that have problematised fat bodies through a focus on the obesity epidemic (Guthman and DuPuis, 2006; Wright, 2009). These medical understandings of body size have disembodied accounts of fatness through positioning fat bodies as abstracted objects of science (Parr, 2002). Developing from medicalised understandings of obesity, there is a growing body of geographical work concerned with the influence that space and place have to rates of obesity, such as the built environment and access to food (Lake and Townshend, 2006). This work, concerned with *obesogenic environments* explores ‘the sum of influences that the surroundings, opportunities, or conditions of life have on promoting obesity in individuals or populations’ (Swinburn and Egger, 2002, p. 292).

Inherent to this work, is the problematic and often unquestioned understanding that obesity is a growing ‘threat’ that needs to be tackled (Foresight, 2007), and the assumption that fatness is both bad and amenable to change through the built environment (Evans *et al.*, 2012). Work of this nature can have significant implications

to how people that do not fit normal understandings of body size are treated, as Hopkins (2008, p. 2116) warns:

Adopting a medicalised approach to body size – in a similar fashion to the natural science models used to justify racial and gendered inequality – has worrying consequences for the ways through which specific groups of people – in particular, those who are deemed to be “obese” – are provided with restricted access to resources, deemed unworthy of particular welfare entitlements or seen as not deserving of particular rights and freedom of expression.

This is not to say that geographical work on body size and urban environments is not valuable, but that it is important for this work to engage with body size from a range perspectives – including critical ones. Doing so, would provide a plethora of voices and experiences to research of this nature, ensuring that equal access to public space is provided to all people of all body sizes (Evans *et al.*, 2012).

There is a growing body of work within critical geography that challenges medicalised and common-sense understandings of body size and the quantification of sized experiences (Longhurst, 2005; Evans, 2006). Much of this work, by social and cultural geographers, seeks to expand academic and popular assumptions about fatness and body size by listening to the ‘often private, sometimes silenced and somewhat concealed experiences of people with different body sizes’ (Hopkins, 2008, p. 2112). In order to do so, much of this work challenges studies that employ medicalised discourses to work on body size by valuing the lived experience. Despite often seeming to directly oppose medical discourses, the purpose of this work is not to challenge the veracity of medicalised understandings of obesity (Evans, 2006), rather, this critical work hopes to broaden perspectives on fatness within academia and to highlight the ‘scientific uncertainties, complexities and contradictions’ that are often overlooked within this work (Lupton, 2013, p. 24).

Interventions by critical geographers have so far been varied in their contributions to this field. Engaging with a variety of methods and theoretical approaches has enabled them to unsettle previously unquestioned knowledge surrounding fatness. There has been work to reveal the extent to which medicalised discourses and power relations in the West assert essentialised ‘facts’ about fat bodies, and how they are subsequently governed and disciplined spatially and temporally (Colls and Evans, 2009; Lupton, 2013). Work of this nature, has significant implications to ‘unravelling’ the discursive representation of fat bodies (Longhurst, 2005, p. 256).

Research has considered the implications that medicalised discourses have for policy interventions. For example, Evans' (2006) critique of a UK House of Commons report on obesity (HOC, 2004), shows how social and cultural discourses are able to reproduce particular moral readings of bodies, subsequently legitimising some (thin bodies), while constructing others (fat bodies) as deviant. In particular, Evans demonstrates the significance of place to these discourses, highlighting the importance of the UK's National Health Service (NHS) to the way that obese bodies are considered a burden for all.

Critical work has focused on the spatially contingent nature of body size by engaging discourse analysis to interrogate the assumption that obesity is a purely biological and epidemiological phenomenon rather than a cultural artefact (Colls and Evans, 2009). McPhail (2009, p. 1022) highlights how concerns over obesity are always situated within specific temporal and spatial power discourses because, 'obesity cannot be divorced from the gendered, raced and classed political economy from which it emerges'. Focusing on popular press and media representations in early Cold War Canada, McPhail (2009) challenges obesity as a purely biological problem by contextualising it within the historical and geographical setting of Cold War Canada. She argues that the 'Tubby Hubby Diet' and fears over obesity as a 'top killer' (p. 1021) in Canada stemmed from gendered and classed social anxieties at that time over the division of labour within the home and the possibility of war.

The intersections of race, class and gender with fatness are also explored in Besio and Marusek's (2014) work on weight loss in Hawaii. Employing discourse analysis to a variety of Weightwatchers' media – such as cookbooks, websites, menus and media articles – they demonstrate the multiple ways that discourses surrounding body size and weight loss are embedded in white, heteronormative and feminine constructions of acceptable bodies and lifestyles. Furthermore they highlight the importance of discourse to how body size is embodied by people that attend Weightwatchers. Reflecting on Foucault's work they suggest that Weightwatchers is able to discipline bodies through the self-governance of eating practices and the continued surveillance through recording weight loss and attending meetings. In addition, the geographical embeddedness of these cultural discourses of body size are recognised. Despite the international focus of Weightwatchers, 'it's values, norms, and prescriptions reflect the organization's history, social context, and a specific type of body' (p. 7). The authors show how within Hawaii this is played out through

normalising certain foods as healthy, and the stigmatisation of certain bodies (non-white ones) through the exclusion of local foods from Weightwatchers discourse.

So far, critical geographical work that has employed poststructuralism has been significant to questioning and challenging medicalised and common sense discourses that underpin much contemporary work surrounding obesity in the West. However, some critics have suggested that an overreliance on discourse may marginalise embodied and material experiences of size (Colls, 2002; Longhurst, 2005; Evans, 2006). Therefore, it is essential that work within critical geographies of body size focuses on the importance of the materiality of the lived experience. As Shilling (1991) suggests, ‘Bodies may be surrounded by and perceived through discourses, but they are *irreducible* to discourse. The body needs to be grasped as an actual material phenomenon which is both affected by and *affects* knowledge and society’ (p. 662, italics in original). Much of the work within Fat Studies has been sensitive to this point – using a variety of qualitative methods, and focusing on the lived experiences of body size.

As one of the first critical geographers to work within this area, Colls (2002; 2004; 2006; 2007) has been keen to focus on the emotional experiences of body size – ‘what it “feels” like to be big rather than what it “signifies” to be big’ (p530). She uses the term ‘bodily bigness’ as a way to challenge fixed labels such as ‘obese’ and ‘overweight’, and to account for the multiple and often contradictory ways that body size is embodied and experienced beyond discursive accounts (Colls, 2006). In her study of British women clothes shopping, Colls (2006) brings together critical work on body size, with geographical engagements with the body by focusing on the ‘lived realities of fat subjectivity’ (p534) within the spatial context of clothes shopping. In so doing, Colls suggests that rather than quantifiable, body size is experienced and narrated through multiple, flexible and contradictory experiences. For example, one may feel their size *emotionally*, that is it may change from day to day and rather than contingent on quantifiable real (BMI or weight) estimates, is often based on how a person feels (Colls, 2002; Longhurst, 2005). Her work challenges dominant studies on obesity by listening to and accounting for the sized body, something she considers to have been ignored within geography due to the assumption that being fat is not acceptable or of value. In her earlier work (Colls, 2004), Colls examines the practices of clothes shopping through her focus on cheating, coping and connecting. She explores how these strategies allow her participants to manage their experiences of clothes shopping – which I will discuss further in this chapter.

At the centre of geographical work on body size is a focus on the everyday. Feminist geographers have been keen to highlight the importance of the everyday to ensuring that women are kept within the visibility of academic research (Rose, 1999). As Dyck (2005) suggests, the everyday and the taken-for-granted provide a methodological entry point for thinking about experiences at a range of scales – from the body to the globe. Focusing on the everyday is important to studies of body size for three reasons: Firstly, to challenge totalising medicalised discourses that construct bodies in binary opposition as either healthy or unhealthy. Secondly, as a way through which to ensure that women's experiences are equally represented within geographical work. Finally, to challenge the academic tendency to value dominant models and ignore the lived experience and the body as a geographic scale.

It has been noted, that despite the prevalence of discussions of fatness within the West, there has been limited engagement with fat people themselves (Kirkland, 2008; Fikkan and Rothblum, 2012). Without listening to and valuing the voices, experiences and opinions of people of different sizes it is impossible to challenge many of the underlying assumptions made about them. In his work on young people's everyday experiences of fatness, Hopkins (2012) focuses on the complexities of everyday experiences of size. He does so by concentrating on two areas that are significant to constructing sized experiences – relationality and intersectionality. Through interviews, Hopkins provides a space for which fatness is discussed beyond medicalised discourses, highlighting the complexities and marginalisation that is often felt by young fat people. For Hopkins, his participants' embodiment is essential to their navigation of space and time, which is shaped through relational and intersectional experiences. He suggests that focusing on narratives of fat embodiment is an essential step in changing the way that fatness is targeted through policy and within society.

Geographical approaches to body size are essential for exploring fatness at a range of geographical scales. However, like much of the discipline, Fat Studies and critical geographies of body size have been dominated by accounts that are defined as Western focused, with few cross-cultural engagements with fatness (Cooper, 2009). All of the literature I have discussed so far has focused on British or American research, reflecting the influence of Anglo-American work in this area. However, there is some work that focuses on fatness beyond Western accounts, which is significant to expanding cross-cultural and non-Western understandings. In Isono *et al.* (2009), the authors employ a qualitative approach to contextualising experiences of body size within contemporary Singaporean culture. In particular, they focus on the Singaporean

government's *Trim and Fit*, programme and how fat-phobic discourse was embodied and experienced by young Singaporeans.

Using in-depth interviews, the authors focus on how weight bias in Singaporean culture impacts the lives of young people diagnosed with eating disorders. In particular, they show how within Singaporean culture, openly speaking and commenting on a person's body size is commonplace. As such, many of the participants recounted how negative experiences of comments on their size made by family, friends, teachers and strangers, had repercussions to their own self-esteem and desires to lose significant amounts of weight. Within the context of Singapore, the authors demonstrate how rapid economic development has coincided with weight-gain by Singaporeans and a rise in eating disorders. As such, programmes like *Trim and Fit* are being used to target childhood obesity. Medicalised understandings of fatness as bad justify fat-phobic comments aimed at encouraging weight loss. However, while it may be assumed that Singapore's fears over the obesity epidemic merely echo Western discourses on fatness following industrialisation and economic development, the implications and everyday experiences of fat phobia are grounded within the specific cultural context of Singapore. This work excellently demonstrates the potential of cross-cultural work on fatness, by showing how the intersections of body size, economic development and Asian values have to everyday embodied experiences of size in Singapore. Developing from this, I will now outline the importance that engaging a cross-cultural perspective has to this research project. To highlight this, I bring together work on embodied transnationalism and Fat Studies, in order to widen perspectives on women's experiences of body size, through a focus on what happens when sized bodies move across national, political, social and cultural borders.

4.4 Trans-sizing

I have introduced trans-sizing as an approach to uniting work within transnationalism and Fat Studies (Lloyd, 2013). It is my contention, that a trans-sizing approach would enable geographers to recognise the way that body size is *as* essential to embodied transnational experiences, as other intersecting identity markers. I use the term to highlight the significance that transnational research could bring to embodied experiences of size, and to acknowledge the contributions of queer politics to Fat Studies. I suggest that:

A trans-sizing approach to Fat Studies and transnationalism will implicate body size and shape as integral to the transnational experience. By doing so, we can respond to calls for greater cross-cultural and global engagements with the sized body by appreciating body size as a significant research agenda within contemporary trans-global discourses. A trans-sizing approach will ground studies of embodied transnationalism through a focus on body size and unpack the implications that multiple identities have in relation to body size such as race, gender, nationality and sexuality. (Lloyd, 2013, pp. 126-127)

Throughout this research project, I have used a trans-sizing approach in order to situate my work within these two areas of literature and continue to do so throughout the following analysis. So far there have been few studies that have explicitly explored the significance of transnational migration to experiences of body size within critical geographies of body size. There is however, work elsewhere which demonstrates a trans-sizing approach by exploring the intersections of immigration, citizenship, health and body size. These research projects highlight the complexities of hybrid identities where people are situated in multiple and complex discourses between their host and homelands (Spivak, 1996), and the implications this has to how they experience and narrate body size. As Abou-Rizk and Rail (2012) demonstrate, with their work on young Lebanese-Canadian women, how body size and health are narrated and experienced is not static, but integrally inter-woven with their own over-lapping, contradictory and shifting cultural identities. The authors suggest that hybrid identities enable the women to ‘borrow’ from both Canadian and Lebanese discourses surrounding health and body size, thus simultaneously performing and rejecting dominant discourses surrounding fatness.

Utilising trans-sizing or cross-cultural perspectives on body size enables academics within critical studies of body size, to expand understandings of body size and how people make sense of and experience it every day. As van Amsterdam (2013) suggests, one such way that this is possible is through work that values different perspectives. Indeed there is already a large body of work within anthropology that explores body size from both a variety of cultural and theoretical perspectives (Popenoe, 2004; Rguibi and Belahsen, 2006; Williams *et al.*, 2006; Brewis *et al.*, 2011). However, as I have argued before (Lloyd, 2013), some of this work employs disembodied quantitative approaches through framings of fatness as inherently bad. Furthermore, while it is important to recognise that fatness is viewed differently in different places

and cultures, this should not be used uncritically, or to further perpetuate binary constructions associating fat acceptance with ‘primitive’ ways of being.

By trans-sizing we are able to explore how cross-cultural perspectives are important to the subversion of dominant ideas regarding fatness. Van Amsterdam (2013) cites the significance of migration to Western countries, and how different people’s experiences of fatness are often celebratory of it. Referencing Rubin *et al.* (2003), she argues that intersectionality provides an important lens through which to explore body size and the way that fatness intersects with gender, ethnicity, class, culture and religion. However, she also highlights that despite the agency of people to construct their own experiences of body image, medicalised discourses surrounding obesity often designate certain non-white people as at risk, and thus are subjected to punitive and disciplinary agendas aimed at slimming their deviant bodies (LeBesco, 2004; Herrick, 2008). This work highlights the multiple ways that body size is bound to racialised and classed constructions of legitimate bodies, and the need to critically interrogate the intersections of body size along other axes of identity such as gender, race and ethnicity, class, sexuality and religion etc. (Hopkins, 2008). In the following sections I engage a trans-sizing perspective to explore the embodied experiences of expatriate women in Singapore.

4.5 Clothes shopping

So far, I have explored the literature on fatness from a critical perspective, reviewing contemporary debates within Fat Studies and critical geographies of body size. It has been my argument that bodies are not ‘pure object[s] of science’ (Parr, 2002, p. 243), nor are they entirely socially constructed through discourse. Instead, it is important to recognise the place of emotions within sized experiences (Colls, 2002); how it *feels* rather than what it *means* to be sized (Davidson and Milligan, 2004), and the significance that different spaces have to this. In the section that follows, I explore fat embodiment further, examining the way that body size and fatness materialised as ‘central to the subjective experience’ (Colls, 2007, p. 359) of expatriate women in Singapore.

The main way that body size was explicitly discussed in the interviews was in relation to clothes shopping. Talking about clothes shopping and wearing clothes enabled me to get at the messiness of emotions invoked in different spatial settings and around different people. The majority of discussions of clothes shopping in Singapore

were negative and typically the same responses followed when I asked the women about clothes shopping. The following extract from Sharon summarises some of the themes I will be developing within this chapter:

What happens, years ago when we first moved here um.. we.. we'd go into a shop and I'd walk in and they would say – *'oh we don't have your size'*. Because in those days we didn't have Zara, we didn't have Country Roads or Marks and Spencer or anything like that we. We only had the local stores. Now Asian people are petite. I mean look at the guys. Some of the guy's waists are smaller than my leg you know, they're very small, they're not big. So when you get a size 12 or a 14 or whatever you wear and you put it on, it might fit you but then you can't drive because the arm holes are in the wrong place or the jacket, the waist is in the wrong place, because it's a completely different cut because they cut it for the Asian size, in those days. So the women feel that they are big, they're fat, they're this, they're that. Then also the women come here, and also it goes sometimes goes to the guy's head, they're getting lots of money they're having their accommodation paid for. In Asia a man is God, a woman, you're nothing and the men are just like flutter flutter, you know whatever. And er these men kind of like the attention and whatever, and it's very difficult for the women because you go out to an office party or whatever, or a this or that, and there are all these cute little girls that look 15, they're actually much older. But they look so cute and they look so young and they're so tiny and you go there, you've just had three babies and you feel like the stuck at home *mother*, in the heat coping with new schools, new this new that, trying to make friends and there's all these beautiful girls around, and it affects the women, it affects the women a lot. And those were a lot of my clients. And some of them I used to come home and say to my husband, *"you know, actually they don't need me they need a counsellor"* because this is way beyond image. This is, they really need to sort out what's going on in their head first before they, but I always said to people you have to err... dress now how you want to be, not wait until you've lost the weight. Why wait until? Because you'll actually, I mean if you actually wear the right colours the right shapes for your body.

[Interruption]

So I used to help women with their sizes and I would just tell them *"you're not big, you're just you're, you're in Asia, and everyone's quite small and petite so of course you're going to feel like you're huge"*. When you go to America, I love going to The States, because I can get, for my top I can get petite, because I'm not very big. Here, you know what, I take XXL, but I don't care I just cut the label out [laughs] (Sharon, 49, UK).

Sharon highlights a number of issues that are of interest to the way that body size is experienced through migration. Beyond the discursive construction of body size, this extract outlines many ways that the materiality of bodies and emotional experiences are important, and how particular experiences – such as clothes shopping – shape and are shaped by embodiment. It is clear from this extract that the materiality of the lived body is important to how women experience themselves in Singapore.

Sharon has lived in Singapore for 18 years and during this time has worked as an image consultant, mainly employed by expatriate women. In this extract, she outlines how migration impacts many women's experiences of their body size and the way that these come to be embodied. This is not just due to inconsistencies in clothes sizes, but a range of influences such as emotional experiences, sense of self-worth, relationality, emotional experiences and mechanisms of resilience. I focus on each of these now in turn.

4.5.1 Sizing

It was well established within the expatriate communities I engaged with that large disparities existed between clothes sizes in Singapore, even when multiple international sizes are displayed on the label (Chun-Yoon and Jasper, 1993). To put it simply, even though retailers often displayed many different international sizes on the label, these did not necessarily correlate to the sizing system used in that country. Therefore many, if not all of the women found that despite, for example displaying the UK size, this had little correlation to the size they would wear in the UK (for the most part it was often significantly smaller). Both within the interviews, and my own experience of living in Singapore, this uncertainty was often the source of frustration and distress during and after clothes shopping when being unable to find clothes that fit, and being 'forced' to buy a larger size (Laitala *et al.*, 2011). This is highlighted by Sharon, as she suggests that although the clothes may be categorised using European or UK sizing, the cut of the clothes is such that it suits an "Asian" physique rather than that of an expatriate (a white European or American expatriate):

So when you get a size 12 or a 14 or whatever you wear and you put it on, it might fit you but then you can't drive because the arm holes are in the wrong place or the jacket, the waist is in the wrong place, because it's a completely different cut because they cut it for the Asian size (Sharon, 49, UK).

The quantification of body size was not only important in order to aid finding clothes that fit and were comfortable, but also can be seen to have contributed to the embodiment of size through this quantification. Thus body size was materialised through sizing practices and subsequently imagined, felt and experienced as a result of conflicting and overlapping global networks of normalised understandings of what is an acceptable body size. As Colls (2004, p. 588) suggests, '[N]umbers or numerical sizing provide the means for women to solidify their body's material form and fix it both spatially and temporally'. It is my argument that for many of the women I spoke with, numerical sizing played a significant role in their embodied experience of size when migrating. For many, the clothes size they were able to physically fit into dictated the type of emotional response they had while clothes shopping, as it 'enables women to make links between past and present, emotional as well as physical, "well-being"' (*ibid* p588). For many of the women, disparities between clothing sizes in Singapore and their home country (often making them get a much larger size), contributed to them feeling negatively about themselves and their body size. Although disparities do exist in different countries (for me the UK was my reference point), it was clear from the women I spoke with and my own experiences, that the sizes in Singapore differed much more than at home. Where Colls (2004) proposes sizing is a way in which to link 'between past and present' and 'spatially and temporally', it is my suggestion that within the context of transnational migration, linkages are also made between home and host, embodying a particular national understanding of what size is and what size they 'should' be. Therefore, the lack of continuity between sizing in Singapore and ability to connect to a previous size at home, often contributed to negative feelings about their bodies as shown in the following three quotes:

You go into a shop and you have to get an XXL it's just a bit depressing (Gail, 50 Scotland).

Jenny: Do you think that you when you first moved here or now, that it changed the way that you think about yourself?

Susan: Yeah, completely, I mean I've always been like a size 12 or 14 [in the UK], and I've always worked out, it's just one of those things that you are the frame you are [sighs]. Then when I got here, you just feel like a giant, you just go in and you're looking at XXXL sizes, thinking *God* (Susan, 40, UK).

I'm writing a blog that's coming out in two weeks, it's about having to buy a couple of dresses and how it's such a kick in the self-esteem. [...] Going shopping here is a nightmare. So I did finally did get two dresses but they are like size XL. I'm like give me a break, I'm 5 foot 9 but I'm not a big person, but then here and the things that they say – "*oh the fat stores over there*". I had this woman, and I have a really tiny waist. And I know Americans are curvy, and erm, one time this woman said "*Oh you have back fat*" [Jenny gasps] and at home, I'm not sure how it works in the UK. But I'm somewhere between 6 and 8, depending because I am tall. But here it's like are you kidding? I mean I, before I came to Singapore I helped people out including bodybuilding and now I'm getting told you need XL (Leigh, 43, Canada).

It is clear from the three quotes above that the numerical sizing used in Singapore impacts the women's experiences of shopping and ultimately how they feel about their bodies in Singapore. Despite knowledge that "all the sizes are different here" (Dawn, 54, UK), there is a clear correlation for many of the women between the numerical size and feeling negatively about themselves (Tiggemann and Lacey, 2009). For many of the women, X (extra) sized clothing had negative connotations in their home countries and as such contributed to labelling their bodies as "'outside" of normative notions of style and sizing' in Singapore (Colls, 2006, p. 537). It is clear from Susan's comment: "it's just one of those things that you are the frame you are [sighs]. Then when I got here, you just feel like a giant", that despite accepting her body in her home country, through migration her body has been cast outside of what she considers normative sizing. What is important is the affect that this quantification has to how she feels. Despite not becoming physically fatter, she embodies and experiences her corporality in a way that makes her feel bigger – "like a giant" – as her size is materialised through sizing her body as XXXL (Colls, 2004).

Clothes sizing serves as a way through which people are able to monitor and regulate their body size, so as to fit within normative constructions of what constitutes a legitimate and healthy body within society. As I argued in chapter three, measures of numerical sizing serve as a bio-political strategy, that enable the women to monitor their bodies through sizing, and deem whether it is acceptable or not through the knowledge they have gained from dominant popular and medical discourses regarding fatness (Wright *et al.*, 2006; Wright, 2009). Therefore, despite knowing that sizing is different to that in their home countries and designed for an "Asian fit" (Sharon), the pervasiveness of the need to fit within particular normative ideas of what is an

acceptable body size, is such that it is able to overrule the objective understanding that “you’re not big ... you’re in Asia” (Sharon), and induce feelings that are “depressing” (Gail), “like a giant” (Susan) and a “kick in the self-esteem” (Leigh). Ironically, despite providing a quantitative way of sizing bodies, these disparities highlight the inadequacies of trying to size any bodies and the impossibilities of doing so.

Colls’ (2004) work has made fundamental advancements to the intersections of body size, emotions and space, and in particular, body size as felt rather than quantified. I extend her argument that ‘numerical sizing provide the means for women to solidify their body’s material form and fix it both spatially and temporally’ (Colls, 2004, p. 588), by exploring what happens when women move transnationally, and within this project – to Singapore. I suggest that for expatriate women, numerical sizing also facilitates the embodiment of particular ideas regarding nationality. Many of the women used knowledge of their size at home to help them construct and emotionally manage their size in Singapore. In so doing, many of the women continued to quantify their bodies through the knowledge of their size at home, situating themselves within Western knowledge of sizes by linking and connecting to their past size. By doing so, many of the women were able to reject the sizes used in Singapore, in recognition that they are much smaller at home. In addition, where Colls’ (2004) work explicitly explored the experience of ‘bodily bigness’ and mine has not, I would argue that for many of the women I spoke with, moving to Singapore made them experience their corporeality in a way not previously experienced, thus often constructing them as ‘outside’, not only in terms of clothing, but also as foreigners within Singapore (I expand upon this further in chapter five).

The quotes above highlight the ways that national identity is embodied and materialised through transnational migration. It is my argument that transnational experiences of body size contribute to cementing particular ideas regarding expatriate identity and nationality in two ways. Firstly, as a way to link back and connect to their home identity, by thinking about and reminiscing over their body size in Singapore in relation to the size they were at home. Secondly, by reinforcing and solidifying a particular expatriate identity by providing a platform for which women connect through shared experiences of body size in Singapore. I contend that nationality becomes embodied and defined through experiences of sizing, and throughout my research was done so at a variety of scales through the use of numerical sizing.

Firstly, national identity was most explicitly embodied through the use of numerical sizing as a point of reference in order to quantify their body size in relation to

the sizing used in their home countries. To be clear, in Singapore where it was common for multiple international sizes to be listed on the clothes label, many women (myself included) would rely on the sizes used in their home countries. However, as the quotes from Gail, Susan and Leigh suggest, this was often the source of unhappiness and frustration when the women were unable to fit within the sizes they would normally be at home. This is not to say this was the case for all of the women I spoke with, but that for many, clothes sizing contributed to a banal nationalism where numerical sizing acted as a point of reference for which nationality (and difference) were experienced, remembered and practised (Billig, 1995). For many of the women I spoke with, size was quantified through the use of numerical sizing used in their home country despite living in Singapore for years. This type of embodied knowledge was often necessary when buying clothes, as for many of the women I spoke with, the majority bought their clothes online or back in their home country when on holiday.

Secondly, during conversations throughout my fieldwork it became apparent that many of the women envisioned and imagined their size in relation to their home sizes, and rejected the sizes used in Singapore. Thus, their *real* body size was materialised through remembering the sizes they wore in their home country, as opposed to Singaporean sizes, which often cast their bodies outside of what they believed to be acceptable. This frustration is noted in my field diary below:

Extract from field diary

Yesterday we went out with Ola and her friend. Later Ola said that her friend had become obsessed with her weight. I too have become a bit obsessed. I have gained weight and feel a bit rubbish. Especially after going shopping and having to buy a size large – I am a UK 10. This is a sentiment shared by everyone I meet. We seem to rationalise our anger by remembering our bodies in a different place, like the sizes we have to buy here aren't our real size because at home it's different.

Reflecting on the extract above, it is important to note that despite my own position as a critical geographer who challenges the negative discourses surrounding fatness, I too am affected by these discourses and have my own experiences regarding sizing and fatness. However, rather than omit these so as not to seem hypocritical, I have included these instances so as to reiterate the conflicting and difficult ways that body size experiences manifest.

For the majority of the women I spoke with, many did not buy their clothes in Singapore, opting instead to buy their clothes online or during visits to family and friends in their home country. There were several reasons for this: availability for larger sizes, the lower cost compared to Singapore, and the negative experiences of having to buy bigger sizes. This is summarised by Martha:

Jenny: Do you ever [clothes] shop here?

Martha: No it's too depressing, it's too expensive and everyone's tiny (Martha, 51, Scotland).

This is not to say that these experiences were shared by all the women I spoke with because for some of the women, Singapore provided them an opportunity to clothes shop, whereas in their home country they could not find clothes to fit them. As Gina states:

Jenny: How do you find shopping?

Gina: It's just way better for me. I'm the opposite of probably most people you have spoken to.

Jenny: I haven't spoken to anyone that has said it's good.

Gina: Because I'm a six. I'm a UK 6/8. If I try and go shopping in the UK I think in the last 2 years it's got better like H&M has sixes now, Next has some sixes, Mango has some. But for most of my life I could never get clothes, I would have to safety pin my trousers and things and look like I was wearing tent and try and get kids clothes (Gina, 30, UK).

I have suggested above the multiple ways that numerical sizing acted as way through which nationality was embodied, and in particular, how expatriate women felt they were labelled as outsiders through having to buy extra-large clothes. Finally, I briefly turn now to highlight some of the ways that numerical sizing often acted as a point of solidarity. It was clear that for some women, discussions regarding (often negative) experiences of clothes shopping, allowed them to unite with one another through shared experiences, contributing to the formation of an expatriate community. During my research, the following story was recounted to me by many of my participants who had experiences of being told they were too fat when buying clothes:

Leigh: I met one lady here and erm, she's from the US, she said back in the US she'd probably be a size 10, 12 so not a big person, fairly average. She went here,

and again she wanted to buy something a swimsuit, something so she could swim in. So she wanted more of the speedo style, the one piece. The woman said “*you’re too fat, too fat*” and she said “*oh that was a kick in the pants*”, and then finally they found her size in XXL and they um, they charged her, so on top of it they charged 25 dollars more because it took more material.

Jenny: [gasp] Oh my God.

Leigh: This much more because it stretches right it’s spandex. She said she never wore the bathing suit because she was so upset. We just get such a, your self-esteem really goes down the drain [in Singapore]. No wonder people join the British Association or the American, because then they will go to a Christmas ball, they’ll go to whatever the thing might be and they’re with people who aren’t going to insult them (Leigh, 43, Canada).

It was also common for many people to state to me their size in their home country when retelling stories like this, as Leigh states here “she’d probably be a size 10, 12 so not a big person, fairly average”. I suggest that this is done to contextualise for me that this person is ‘not big’ and thus not worthy of shaming. However, if the person had been ‘big’ I wonder if shaming tactics like this would be considered more deserved? I have chosen the above quote, as Leigh highlights the way that nationality and body size are intertwined. She suggests, that by joining clubs like the British Association, women are able to surround themselves with similar body sizes, which in Singapore is necessary in order to help the women feel better about themselves through ‘connecting’ with other bodies that look like theirs (Colls, 2004, p. 583). This echoes the comments made earlier by Sharon (p. 116) who suggested that:

It’s very difficult for the women because you go out to an office party [...] and there are all these cute little girls that look [...]. But they look so cute and they look so young and they’re so tiny.

It became clear that many of the women felt more comfortable when people they could connect with surrounded them. I suggest that although this is largely to do with race and ethnicity, it is intersectional, where gender, ethnicity, class and body size are also important. It is my argument that body size acts as a way through which expatriates are able to unite over shared experiences of feeling outsized within Singapore. This is not to say that this was the case for all women, but for many of those I spoke with, and myself included, anecdotes were often shared providing a form of solidarity among expatriates, while simultaneously marking our bigger bodies as outsiders. I extend this argument

further in chapter five.

4.6 Emotional size

In her review of *Bodies out of bounds: fatness and transgression* (Brazier and LeBesco, 2001), Colls (2002) proposes the idea of emotional size as a way to explore fatness as felt. As Longhurst (2005, p. 249) explains, “Emotional size” is the way through which people perceive their bodies. Some ‘average sized or even ‘thin people understand themselves to be fat [...] while some fat people understand themselves to be ‘average or perhaps even “thin”. Rather than quantifying bodies as healthy or unhealthy, emotional size provides an alternative explanation for the way that body size is experienced differently in different spatial, social and cultural contexts. It could be argued that geographers have been ‘squeamish’ about focusing on the sized body (Longhurst, 2005, p. 252), this too can be said of emotions (Davidson *et al.*, 2005). By trans-sizing I seek to explore the intensely emotional way that transnational spaces are implicated in the processes of embodiment, and the dynamic ways that bodies and materiality shape our experiences of bodily boundaries.

By speaking with expatriate women in Singapore, it became clear that migration had significant implications to the ways that body size was felt. To be clear, by emotional size I mean the shifting, contradictory and complex ways that size comes to be embodied through spatial and temporal interactions, as opposed to solely through the quantification of corporeality such as weight, BMI or clothes sizing. Indeed, ‘emotion has the power to transform the shape of our lives’ (Davidson *et al.*, 2005, p. 1) and I would argue – the shape of our bodies. I do not wish to suggest that bodies and matter are passive recipients of discourse that shape and are shaped by emotions (Colls, 2007). Instead, that emotions, discourse and bodily matter interact in ways that are central to the subjective experience. Thus, by recognising body size as constructed through emotional experiences, it is possible to begin to explore the factors that come to shape embodied experiences. Take for example Melissa’s account of emotional size:

I think it’s been more of a confidence issue and a focus. Weight never really is the problem, it is the branch or the trunk. The root or however you want to look at it. The root is always something else. I think personally how I see myself depends on how I feel (Melissa, 38, UK).

Emotional size is most explicitly shown by Melissa when she suggests: “how I see myself depends on how I feel”. For Melissa her body size and how she experiences

it is often shaped through emotional experiences as opposed to solely through quantification. This is not to say that dominant discourses regarding normal and healthy weights are not important to her – she made reference throughout the interview about weighing herself and the use of BMI. Instead, her feelings towards her size are ambivalent, shifting between a lengthy discussion of her weight loss practices: “that’s my goal to lose weight in order to be more comfortable with myself”, but on the other hand, one of a “confidence focus”, where how she feels about her body size is often determined by her own happiness and acceptance of her body. As it has been suggested previously, how people come to experience their bodies and body image is ‘full of contradiction’ (Banister, 1999, p. 520). It was clear from my discussion with Melissa, and indeed with many of the participants that this was certainly the case. What is important is the fluid and dynamic nature through which Melissa experiences her body size, which as she suggests, is felt differently at different times and in different places.

From meeting with Melissa several times she spoke to me about her attempts to lose weight and some of the various strategies to do so – mainly through diet and exercise – and her experiences of “successfully” losing 50lbs, and then her feelings of “failure” upon gaining it back again. Melissa suggested that rather than focus now on losing weight (although this clearly was still a goal for her), she was more invested in practices of feeling better and managing her emotions towards her body in a variety of ways, such as: using life coaches, stylists and attending a variety of courses. Ultimately, for Melissa, active involvement in managing her emotions towards her body helped her to experience her corporeality more positively. However, it was clear that emotional management, rather than aligning her more with size acceptance and pride (Wann, 1998), suggests a ‘coming to terms’ with her body size and learning to manage her experiences (and expectations).

As it has been argued elsewhere (Yeoh and Willis, 1999; Willis and Yeoh, 2000b), women are often central to managing the emotional wellbeing of their families during expatriate migration. Discussions of emotion work have often focused on women’s unpaid role within the domestic sphere, and their role in maintaining the home and family while away (Yeoh *et al.*, 2000; Hardill, 2004). Within the global city, whereas (expatriate) men’s work is often tied to the public and economically viable domain, women are often recognised as important only within the domestic realm (Weland, 1997). As one of Beaverstock’s (2002, p. 534) participants in his work on British expatriates in Singapore suggested, ‘your wife has to be... a charming hostess to your clients or she is a disadvantage to your career’. Feminist work in this area has

emphasised the significance of emotions in shaping transnational experiences, and the need for emotional work in managing culture shock (Walsh, 2012). However, little work on transnationalism and Fat Studies has recognised the emotional implications of migration to experiences of body size. In the following two sections I explore the interplay between bodies, emotions and migration. First, I explore the significance of migration and different places. Second, I focus on narratives of *coming to terms*.

4.6.1 Bodies and places

For many of the women I spoke with, learning to manage their emotions in relation to their bodies and body size was an important aspect of adapting to living in Singapore, one that is often overlooked within the literature on migration. However, as the quote by Anne below suggests, emotional experiences of body size can have significant implications for how people experience migration to Singapore, and highlights the necessity for academics to theorise the multiple ways that size can be felt, rather than focus on what it signifies. In the extract by Anne it is apparent that there are clear relational, spatial and temporal implications to how she emotionally embodies her size:

Anne: I felt – like – a –whale – when I came here, I did, I felt like a whale. I felt enormous. I lived in the heart of business district where they were all really posh and you know and they all looked immaculate. And I didn't feel immaculate, I didn't feel nice.

[... Later in the interview]

I think when I first came and everybody was so tiny, and I thought *well I'm so huge*, and I thought *well I'm nearly 50 for god's sake Anne shut up. You're not built like them you're not Asian you're not built like them just deal with it*. And um I started doing lot of cycling with my friends and I got a new bike for Christmas and now I'm out there on my bike pedalling and I know I'm exercising I know I'm lot fitter than I use to be. It might not be shown on the scales all the time (Anne, 49, Scotland).

Firstly, Anne suggests that her body size is spatially contingent, reliant on the spaces that she inhabits (“in the heart of the business district”). Secondly, that she experiences her size relationally, in relation to the other bodies around her that inhabited the places she was in (“everybody was so tiny”). Thirdly, that it is temporal and has changed over time (“when I first came here”). I discuss these three points below.

Many of the women I spoke with discussed physical social spaces, which had implications to the way they experienced their body size or made them feel conscious of their embodiment. Several participants discussed how they became more self-conscious in the Central Business District, for example around Raffles, Orchard Road and City Hall MRT, and linked this to the prevalence of younger, “immaculate” women (both Asian and expatriate). It became clear throughout many of these discussions, that body size was not just about size but the perception of it. It was often suggested that the professional classes style also affected how the women felt about themselves as both larger but also less “immaculate”. The idea that body size is spatially contingent and relational is discussed further by Jessica:

Like if I am in Orchard Road and I’m walking around in Paragon right. I look terrible you see. Fat! White! Because I’m much bigger. Whereas if I was to go near Woodlands out near the American school no one looks at me twice because it’s full of rather larger American women and because Woodlands is a sort of HDB [Housing Department Board] kind of hub type place. There are a lot of very big Malay women and big Indian women (Jessica, 42, New Zealand).

It is clear from this extract that body size and space are significant. Additionally Jessica suggests that ethnicity, class and nationality are important. Paragon shopping mall is located on Orchard Road, a central shopping area in Singapore known for its high end and designer shops and a certain ‘expatriate sense of place’ (Beaverstock, 2011, p. 247). In opposition, Woodlands is located in the North of Singapore very close to Johor Bahru in Malaysia and is considered one of the ‘heartland’ areas of Singapore.²⁵ Based on my own observations and conversations, Jessica is hinting at the dominance of expatriate and Chinese Singaporean women in Orchard Road as opposed to the “big” Malay and Indian women that populate the Woodlands area. It is clear therefore, that she experiences her body size in relation to other women’s bodies, both to their size but also their ethnicity and class. Her whiteness is made more apparent through experiencing herself as “fat”, and through recognition that the people that populate Orchard Road (in comparison to Woodlands) come from different classed backgrounds. As such, she feels that she “look[s] terrible” and is made to stand out as “fat” and “white”. I focus more on these intersections in chapter five.

²⁵ The heartland areas of Singapore are areas dominated by HDB public housing estates where the majority of Singaporeans live (Wong and Bunnell, 2006).

Another – rather different way – that highlights the intersections of emotions, embodiment and space was discussed by Emma. During my interview with Emma she spoke of a difficult period when first moving to Singapore and having several miscarriages. During this discussion she talked about how different spaces shaped her embodied experiences, and significantly, her own problems with conception and experiences of miscarriage. In particular, Emma suggested that she would avoid Tanglin Mall, (a shopping mall popularly understood as dominated by expatriates) because “everywhere you look there’s pregnant women” (Emma, 41, UK). In her work on pregnant bodies, Longhurst (2000, p. 455) discusses the ‘complex corporeographies’ of pregnant bodies, as sites where ‘gender, hegemony, power and performativity may be mapped in relation to pregnant embodiment’. Throughout she discusses how pregnant performances construct and disrupt gendered discourses surrounding pregnancy and how certain corporeal practices become normative. For Emma, her own mobility is modified in relation to her recognition of the particular spaces – Tanglin Mall – as sites of normative performances of pregnant embodiment. Therefore, following from Butler’s (1990, p. 136) assertion that gendered identities are ‘sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means’, it is my argument that certain spaces are also mapped in relation to particular gendered performances, and thus shape and are shaped by imagined geographies of what those spaces represent. For Emma, Tanglin Mall represents a space marked by pregnant embodiment, and as such she is made to feel her own corporeality, through the absence of size (a baby bump), in relation to other pregnant bodies.

From many of the discussions it was clear that body size and space intersected in ways that influenced how the women experienced their corporeality. For many, clothes shopping made them *feel* fatter in relation to the numerical sizing used, or comments from shop assistants. For others like Anne and Jessica, the CBD influenced their experiences of feeling “like a whale” (Anne) or “terrible” (Jessica), when they experienced themselves in relation to other women. Such reflections highlight the emotional significance of body size and its flexible and fluid nature. It is commonly acknowledged that bodily boundaries can become smaller and larger through the physical distribution of adipose tissue, i.e. through dieting and exercising – the premise that a large amount of (anti)obesity discourse is based upon. However, it is my argument that our emotional interactions with spaces and people around us, can become embodied in a way that implicates our size as felt, so that there are multiple ways that size can be lived and experienced. There, like emotions, our body size is dependent on

the socio-cultural spaces that we find ourselves in. How body size is experienced can change throughout the day, as people move around the city in relation to different places and people, and the practices we engage in.

4.6.2 *Coming-to-terms*

The third aspect highlighted by Anne that is of note is the temporal nature of body size. Prominent in many of the discussions was the immediate impact that migration had to experiences of body size and the suggestion that over time, some were able to *come-to-terms* with feeling larger. In addition, many of the women discussed the significance that ageing had on their body size, both in terms of the materiality of their bodies and their ability to negotiate these changes. I use coming-to-terms to implicate the emotional and temporal within embodied experiences as significant to the negotiation of bodily matter and identity during migration. By coming-to-terms I suggest that women are able – to some degree – to emotionally manage their embodied experiences, and as such are active agents in their feelings towards their bodies over time after migration. Paradoxically, coming-to-terms also suggests a tolerance rather than acceptance of body size, one that is always mediated to some extent by dominant discourses surrounding fatness.

Within both academic and popular work on migration, the transition to a new country has been seen to involve significant negotiation of the embodied implications of migration, most explicitly negating against the negative effects of culture shock (Walsh, 2012). In Walsh's work on the emotional experiences of expatriates in Dubai, she highlights how certain discourses are naturalised through the assumption that cultural difference is always problematic, and that negative experiences such as shock and anger are an inevitable part of migration. Indeed discussions regarding the transition to a foreign country comprised a large part of my research and personal experiences of migration both prior to and during my time in Singapore – despite a common understanding that Singapore is “Asia for beginners” (Sonja, 35, Canada) or “not really Asia” (Dawn, 54, England), and thus easier to move to.²⁶ Countless blogs, websites and travel guides provide advice on how to alleviate some of the initial ‘shock’ of migration and include discussions of how to negotiate places and practices like hawker centres (Kong, 2007)²⁷, *Kiasu* and Singlish²⁸. What is not often included in many of these

²⁶ These comments were common within my interviews and personal experiences and are related to a dominant idea that Singapore is more Westernised and thus easier to move to.

²⁷ Hawker centres are open-air food complexes that sell a variety of low-cost dishes.

guides is the impact that migration has to experiences of body size. However, this is not to say that body size is not important. Many women commented that friends of theirs that had moved to Singapore before them had advised them to stock up on clothes before they moved, both because of the lack of larger sizing and the high cost of clothes in Singapore.

For many of the women I spoke with, coming-to-terms with their size was not only a result of the initial experiences of migration, but also in relation to their own experiences of ageing. Both these factors are suggested in the quote by Anne: “I think when I first came and everybody was so tiny and I thought well I’m so huge and I thought well I’m nearly 50 for god’s sake Anne shut up”. Clearly for some, migration to Singapore forced many of the women to think (and feel) about their bodies in ways they may not have done so previously. However, in addition to migration, age and ageing shaped many of the women’s experiences of their body size and there is clear scope to develop work on the intersections of body size and ageing.

Again, what is important is the way that emotions are implicated and how feelings and wellbeing can shape a person’s sized experience of migration. Many of the statements about body size made by participants started with “when I first arrived” (Susan, 40, UK), and suggested that over time they had learnt to adapt to negotiating their body size in a different way, much like many other adaptations when migrating. Consider the following two examples:

Maria: In the past it would affect me to be like *oh I’m XL* but now I’m like pff that’s me and what else?

Jenny: Why do you think it doesn’t affect you so much now?

Maria: I think that it’s a change of mind set (Maria, 30, Mexico).

Christina: They’re [Singaporeans] just so direct I mean I was just so upset [when asked if she was pregnant] because I was so fragile at the time. I laugh at it now because I’m used to how direct they can be (Christina, 46, UK).

Maria and Christina highlight the ways that how it feels to be a certain size can develop over time, and that emotions can shape both experiences of size and those of Singapore. Although many of the discussions regarding body size were dominated with homogenous accounts of fatness as bad, there were moments within which these ideologies were disrupted and challenged. Many suggested that through time they

²⁸ Singlish is an English-based creole language spoken in Singapore.

acclimatised to living in Singapore (and feeling bigger), whereas others (like Maria, Anne and Melissa) discussed how their “mind set”, feeling fitter or overall feelings of happiness resulted in positive embodied experiences regardless – as Anne states – if it is “shown on the scales”.

To clarify, the key arguments are as follows. First, although all of the discussions highlighted the significance that dominant discourses regarding fatness and obesity shaped many of the ways that the women discussed and experienced their size, the interviews highlighted the way that size was also shaped through emotional experiences. Second, transnational migration substantially impacted many of the women’s emotional size, prompting them to experience and understand their corporeality in new ways. As such, body size is emotional and can change over time and in different places – It is highly relational. Finally, happiness and sense of self-worth appeared to have positive implications to how many of the women felt about their size. In the following section I focus on this third point by highlighting some of the ways that the women subverted and challenged dominate ideas surrounding body size and their resilience to this after migration to Singapore.

4.7 Resilience: humour and indifference

A final aspect of emotional size that I will focus on here is the some of the contradictory ways that the women experienced body size, and moments of resilience. I have highlighted in chapter three and in this chapter, how anti-obesity discourse was embodied by many of the women that could imply that they are passive recipients of oppressive structures. What is key to my argument is that by exploring body size as emotional we can recognise that it is fluid and flexible. Indeed, how body size and shape is experienced, changes from day-to-day and in different places and times. For example, we can go from feeling “freaky”, to then “enjoying” (Julie, 40, Australia) our body size. This chapter has focused to a large extent on the ways that women experienced their size negatively. I wish to take some time now to discuss moments and tactics of resilience, and also how feelings of wellbeing and happiness shaped experiences of body size.

4.7.1 Humour as resilience

One way, through which many of the women discussed dealing with their experiences of body size upon migration to Singapore, and in particular negative experiences, was

through the use of humour. Migration to Singapore meant that for many of the women they experienced their body size in a new way – in relation to other smaller bodies, and within a different cultural context. I have shown throughout how many of the women found that moving to Singapore resulted in them experiencing their body size in a new way (as fatter), and for many this was often upsetting. I have already highlighted the significance that shopping had to many participants' embodied experiences. The following shopping account was typical of the stories that I heard with over half recounting something similar:

Jenny: So one of the things I'm quite interested in is body image when you migrate and not just body image but experiences of your race and size and things like that.

Lauren: I GET that. When I was trying to lose my pregnancy weight. We were in Singapore already I was trying to get clothes. I said, and I asked the shop attendant if they have my size. *"Maybe but it's probably XL'."* "WHAT?", *"You maybe want to go to that the other shop because maybe we don't have this".* *"Can't you just try can't I just try maybe?"* and that makes me maybe a little upset at the beginning, or when they, when they say *"oh maybe we don't have your size because you look big"* *"what do you mean I'm big?"* [Getting louder]

Jenny: Let's be honest you're tiny.

Lauren: I'm tiny. What are you [they] talking about? If I am considered big what about the other ones [expatriates]?

Jenny: So that obviously didn't make you feel particularly good?

Lauren: Yeah.

Jenny: Do you laugh it off or do you think it has an effect on you?

Lauren: I let it go, anyway whatever. I mean I have enough confidence to say, I'm fit I feel fit, I feel healthy. I don't care about your opinion and I think you're just too damn skinny [laughs]! (Lauren, Indonesia, age undisclosed).

The above extract is a typical example of shopping experiences that many of the women recounted to me. For many of the women I spoke with, experiences of being told they were "big" (like Lauren) or "too fat" (Like Leigh, p. 122) was upsetting and had implications for their experiences of Singapore and their own bodies. Many of the women suggested that bluntness and receiving comments about their bodies from strangers was part of Singaporean culture, and as such was something they had to get used to. Isono *et al.* (2009) discuss how within Singapore, commenting on a person's size and shape is widely accepted. They suggest that, as Singapore has become a superpower, ideas around body size have changed through an adoption of 'Western

values' (p. 128) resulting in preference for thinness.²⁹ This aspect of Singaporean culture was noted by many of the women and resulted in different responses. As we see with Lauren, responses to Singaporean bluntness regarding her size varied between disbelief and upset ("what do you mean I'm big?"), to dismissiveness ("I let it go"), and retaliation ("I don't care about your opinion and I think you're just too damn skinny").

Personal reflection

I also want to bring attention to my own comment within the discussion with Lauren (p. 132): "let's be honest you're tiny". I am aware on reflection that this comment is very much a result of anti-obesity discourses of which I am part of. That in reassuring Lauren that she is "tiny", I am reaffirming discourses in which being "XL" or "big" is considered to be bad by suggesting that she is "tiny" and therefore not deserving of body shaming. In listening back I can hear the shock in my tone, that these comments are not justified because she isn't fat (but what if she was? Would she be more deserving?). When writing it into my thesis I wanted initially to remove this comment and edit myself out. To make it seem that I maintain my commitment to being a critical geographer of body size at all times. I was concerned that comments like this might undermine my argument. But of course I didn't, and couldn't. When I listen back I don't hear myself as a critical geographer I hear myself as a friend, as someone who is talking with Lauren about an experience where she might want some reassurance, and as someone who knows where she is coming from (Haraway, 1988). When I listen back I can hear her frustration and outrage at these shopping incidences (which she refers back to several times throughout), and I can understand why I said it. Yet, when the words appear, disembodied in this chapter, I can also see how despite my critical stance theoretically, my interviews and sometimes my comments, gasps, and laughs are reflective of dominant discourses on fatness and this is something I must accept.

²⁹ As I discussed in chapter one, much of the work on body size uses the idea of the West uncritically where ideas regarding body size (predominantly the desire to be thin) are assumed to be Western traits. I appreciate that these terms are contested and wish to highlight the power of them in reinforcing geopolitical and binary ideas regarding the West/others.

Cultural differences in Singapore regarding how people talk about bodies was summarised by Christina previously:

Christina: They're [Singaporeans] just so direct I mean I was just so upset [when asked if she was pregnant] because I was so fragile at the time. I laugh at it now because I'm used to how direct they can be (Christina, 46, UK).

The story from Lauren was a shopping account I became familiar with hearing during my interviews, as too was the comment made by Christina. Many of the women suggested that humour was one way to deal with comments from strangers (usually shop assistants) about their body size. Some of the women recounted amusing strategies that they used to challenge and deal with the comments made. Take for example the following three stories:

I was with a friend not too long ago and you know, she said. We were in this shop, and this woman, and she's a fairly big girl. And this lady had come over and said "*I'm sorry but we don't have, I don't think we have that in your size*". And um I mean my friends a corker with these things, she'll just say: "*oh well that's good because you're clothes are mingin anyway*" [laughing] "*you obviously don't have anything to fit me or anyone*", and I nearly wet myself.^{30 31} She was like "*yeah come on*" [let's leave]. And I mean this woman's face she was just staring at us as we walked out of the shop. She couldn't believe, she didn't have an answer for it. And I was like "*wow that's a good one*". And she, her other one is er "*yeah because you know we [expatriates] actually have boobs so you probably don't have anything to fit boobs*" (Carly, 40, UK).

And I long since gave up the idea that I can shop for clothes properly here. Erm, if I think there's half a chance that I can find something that will fit me. I will go into a shop and say "*have you anything that will fit my big bottom*". Because when I first moved here, what was it, 6 years ago now? I was going into places and saying, "*have you got any shorts, have you got any trousers*" and they'd say "*no we've got nothing for you you've got big fat bottom*", and that is an experience that at that point. I wasn't the only person having that [inaudible]. And I actually didn't see

³⁰ A 'corker' is something that is excellent or good. In this case a funny person.

³¹ 'Mingin' is British slang for something that is disgusting or gross.

myself fat at all, even coming here and being fatter than a lot of the local people. You're just a different shape. Different size is normal (Dawn, 54, UK).

I went in one day, I think my son was about um 6 at the time. And I went in and I tried some jeans. And you know it's such a faff to take them off and go out and get some [from the changing room]. So I popped my head out of the curtain and said "*excuse me do you have a bigger size?*" and she pulled back the curtain, she said "*oh!*" she says, "*you just have baby?*" And I said "*YES I just had a baby*" [angrily] and she said "*how old is he?*", I said "*he's 6!*" [laughs] she said, "*6 months?*", "*no*" I said "*he's 6 years!*". And I pulled the curtain back and thought you wanna be rude lady, I can be, give it. She was shocked. Because how rude to ask if I'd just had a baby, and if I had just had a baby how would I feel? I would feel the lowest of the low. But I don't care what people think about me (Sharon, 49, UK).

It is clear from these three comments that humour was utilised in different ways to respond to negative comments made regarding their bodies. To clarify, I am referring to these comments as 'negative comments' because that was the way my participants interpreted them to be. As such, being told they were "fat", had a "big bottom" or looked like they had just had a baby, was considered to be rude and/or upsetting and thus required some amount of response through which to deal with: first, feeling upset or angry. Second, the cultural difference in Singapore within which commenting on a stranger's body is more acceptable (Isono *et al.*, 2009).

There is work that has explored humour as a mechanism for perpetuating dominant discourses regarding heteronormative identities (Kehily and Nayak, 1997). Within research on body size, humour has often been explored as a mechanism to shame and oppress (Gullage, 2012; Hopkins, 2012). However, work has also examined 'the use of humour in response to experiences of exclusion and marginalisation to be a useful device in helping them to manage specific social situations' (Hopkins, 2012, p. 1241). As Hopkins suggests, the three examples above highlight the way that humour was mobilised as a strategy of resilience in different ways.

In the first extract, Carly discusses an occasion where her friend responded to being told that the clothes in the shop wouldn't fit her. Her response – saying the clothes in the shop were "mingin" – highlights how humour can be used to challenge everyday experiences of fat shaming, and a rejection of the shame directed at her body through redirecting it towards the clothes in the shop. It is clear from Carly's comment: "her other one [comeback]", is that Carly's friend has established a variety of devices

through which to challenge and respond to negative comments aimed at her body. What Kirkland (2008, p. 410) defines as ‘redirecting shame’:

Redirecting shame is what I call verbal responses to ill treatment. The technique is similar to moral instruction in that it is situational and interactive, but it is less “legal” in the sense of being less about teaching an antagonist the proper way to evaluate another person and more about showing off a new-found confidence in what NAAFA members called “snappy comebacks.” [...]. This technique involves moving shame and social disapproval back onto the person who initiated the situation and may bring in onlookers on the fat person’s side

In the situation described by Carly, shame is redirected at the clothing assistant who appears to be shocked and hasn’t got a response (“she didn’t have an answer for it”). The account of this was incredibly amusing and we can both be heard laughing throughout as she retells the story. Stories like this highlight as Kirkland argues, the mechanisms by which people can resist and challenge dominant discourses regarding fatness and body size. In responding to the woman in the shop and by Carly re-telling the story to me, we are all involved in acts that stand up to the status-quo of how people of different body sizes are treated. However, I would also argue that from a transnational perspective, these tactics reflect a wider need for women to manage the adjustment to moving to Singapore and dealing with the different social and cultural norms where these comments are normalised (as Isono et. al suggest, comments regarding a person’s size are more commonplace in Singapore). Secondly, Carly’s friend’s second ‘comeback’: “*yeah because you know we actually have boobs so you probably don’t have anything to fit boobs*”, reflects wider discourses regarding how sexuality, ethnicity, othering and difference are maintained and mobilised through body size discourses. I expand on this further in chapter five.

Another use of humour is highlighted in the extract by Dawn (p. 134). However, unlike with Carly’s friend, I would argue that rather than redirecting shame, Dawn can be seen to use another tactic noted by Thomas *et al.* (2007, p. 325) – making fun of myself. Making fun of herself by asking “have you anything that will fit my big bottom” is a tactic employed by Dawn through which to navigate what could be a potentially negative experience, by pre-empting the response she will receive in shops. However, it is clear from Dawn that she has learnt to deal with these negative instances over time, and that initially statements about her “big fat bottom” were upsetting (“that is an experience that at that point”). As I suggested before, Dawn has had to come-to-

terms with her body size in Singapore, in relation to other bodies (“being fatter than a lot of local people”), and in relation to the different cultural context within which comments about strangers’ bodies are more commonplace. During the conversation Dawn spoke positively about her body size, but is it clear from this extract that this has taken time and has been dependent on multiple factors. Dawn insinuates that having comments made to her when she had first moved were upsetting “at that point” but now she has learnt to deal with them. Using humour has enabled Dawn to become resilient to discourses regarding her body size and from our discussion it seemed as though she no longer felt concerned about being/feeling “bigger”. It is clear from these extracts that humour is utilised in multiple ways to resist and challenge dominant and oppressive discourses regarding fatness.

Additionally, it became clear from many of the interviews that receiving comments about body size were considered to be a normal aspect of Singaporean culture, one that they had to learn to adapt to: “I laugh at it now because I’m used to how direct they can be” (Christina, 46, UK). However, for many of the women I spoke with, this was initially an upsetting aspect of the migration process particularly when it highlighted their own concerns regarding their body size. From several of the interviews it became clear that humour; *redirecting shame*, *making fun of myself* and *laughing it off*, were important mechanisms through which to challenge and resist negative comments and experiences. In the following section I explore the use of humour further and the politics of indifference.

4.7.2 The politics of indifference

In the third extract, Sharon (p. 135) responds like Carly’s friend by redirecting shame – ridiculing the shop assistant’s question. It was clear as Sharon retold this story that she was angry at being asked if she was pregnant as she finds it rude, but is also aware of how this could make other people feel (“you would feel the lowest of the low”). However, by stating that she doesn’t “care what other people think” about her, Sharon highlights another aspect of resilience that I found within this research project – indifference. Many of the women I spoke to discussed indifference in relation to their body size. For many, indifference was often shown in the women’s responses to my questions about how they experienced body size in Singapore, stating that they didn’t really think or care about their body size or appearance:

Jenny: One thing that I'm quite interested in is body image and ideas of beauty in Singapore and how that's different to say other global ideas. Have you noticed any differences would you say in how you feel about yourself or how you dress?

Alda: I don't really care [laughs]. I know they have, you know you see people going to work and you just think, oh my God, you know. And I see the mums dropping the kids in the nursery and they're all you know, well-groomed with high heel shoes. And I just think I can't do that really, I don't have time to for that unless I wake up at 5 o'clock in the morning or whatever. So I see how they behave or how they do things but I'm, really because I suppose because of the way I am, I just, I'm the way I am you take it or leave it. I don't cope well with peer pressure in that sense I just do my own thing (Alda, 36, Portugal).

I asked a similar question like this to all of my participants (unless they answered the question without prompting) and the responses varied significantly. For many of the people I spoke with, this type of questioning incited a lengthy discussion regarding body size and often bodily dissatisfaction. However, as we see here with Alda, many of the women I spoke with appeared indifferent. Although Alda is aware that within Singapore there is pressure on women to look a certain way ("I know they have"), she doesn't seem interested in worrying about this or responding to discourses ("peer pressure") regarding how women should look. This was a typical response for some of the women I spoke with who either answered it by directly stating that they weren't interested in these pressures, or by answering the question briefly in a blasé manner. This response echoes those of some of the boys and men interviewed in Grogan and Richards' (2002) work. They found that some of their participants were 'not bothered' (p. 227) about their body image or dieting, and attributed this to dominant discourses within which it was not considered masculine to be concerned about their body image, which was considered to be a feminine pursuit. It is my understanding that within my research, indifference is a reflection of my sampling method and how my research was framed. Rather than focus on recruiting participants that wanted to specifically focus on body size (like many studies within Fat Studies), I spoke to a variety of women regarding a range of issues. As such, the focus of the interviews were often determined by the participant. Those that were indifferent (or perhaps uncomfortable), speaking about their body size chose not to focus on this. I believe that as a result, my research explores embodied experiences from a range of perspectives.

Initially when I was carrying out my fieldwork, several of my participants gave brief answers to questions about body size and image or clothes shopping, and I was

concerned that I was not focusing explicitly enough on this as a topic. Instead, participants chose to talk about a variety of issues such as childcare, work, food and travel – but only briefly on experiences of size. For many of the women body size, fitness and dieting were things they suggested they didn't worry about too much. This is not to say they were impervious to body size discourses but rather that they were likely to be ambivalent, and during the interview appeared indifferent and often focused on other aspects of migration or considered body size concerns as trivial within their lives (like Alda). Despite my initial concerns that I wasn't getting the 'right' type of data, upon analysis I have found this not to be the case. Instead I believe it is precisely this indifference that is of significance.

In his work, Gorman-Murray (2013) proposes the idea of 'silent activism'. He focuses on how everyday interactions, rather than overtly political or legal activism, have profound implications for securing rights and challenging dominant understandings of identity – in his case masculinities. Silent activism therefore recognises the importance that everyday relations have to propelling social change. Developing from this, it is my argument that indifference can act as a form of silent activism that can, to some degree, undermine homogenous, gendered discourses regarding body size and women's bodies. Indeed, whereas I have argued that body size discourses have significant implications to embodied experiences of migration, so too does indifference. This is not to say that women do not care at all as many were ambivalent about their size. Instead I suggest that indifference provides an important opportunity to subvert (anti)obesity discourses, shaping how many women embody experiences of size. In addition, ambivalence highlights women's agency in doing so, regardless of whether or not they mean it to. By being indifferent: for example, not dieting, not weighing themselves, not calorie counting and not talking about the above, lies the potential for women to challenge discourses and improve their wellbeing and feelings of happiness towards themselves, rather than focusing on what for many, appears to be a source of anguish and pain. I have already discussed (chapter three) the implications of fat talk. I argue that in choosing not to talk (in answer to my questions), and indifference to anti-fat discourses, is inherently political but not overtly so. By undermining or being indifferent to discourses, women have the potential to change taken-for-granted assumptions regarding femininity and pressures to be a certain size. Paradoxically, in indifference perhaps lies the potential for change.

There are of course limits to this argument. To clarify, I am arguing that indifference to body size discourses can help to limit the way through which they come

to be embodied negatively. It is a form of activism that is not overtly political in any way, some of the women I spoke to just did not seem to care. This is unlike everyday activism, such as women not shaving their legs as political protest (Fry and Lousley, 2001), because it is less of a conscious political act. I suggest, following from Gorman-Murray (2013), that in spending time around people that don't participate in fat talk (Nichter, 2000) and body shaming – through indifference rather than censorship – we can change the way that people embody and experience their corporeality. However, it could also be argued that indifference is a luxury afforded to only those that fit within normative understandings of what is considered to be an acceptable body. For many that do not *fit* – both discursively and physically – they are reminded daily that they *should* care more, such as clothing not fitting or reminders from shop assistants that they are “too fat”.

Indifference is not static and totalising it is spatially contingent, emotional and relational. For those that suggested they ‘don’t care’, this does not mean that they do not care all the time. Clearly how people feel about and experience their bodies changes. Additionally, for those that discussed at length their feelings towards their bodies, this does not mean that all of their experiences are overshadowed by this. It is important to acknowledge that in focusing on this I have foregrounded expatriate women’s experiences within experiences of body size. Take for example Beth, who is following on from a lengthy discussion about her experiences of feeling fat in Singapore:

And in the UK I just don’t give a toss, I just shrug it off, because you know, because at the end of the day I know who I am there. But I don’t here [Singapore]. Or at least I’m getting to the point now where I’m thinking I’ve just got to take the same attitude I get there [the UK]. Um, but it’s quite, it’s one of the things that (laughing) worried me before coming here that I’d be living in some kind of gilded cage, where I’d suddenly have to become interested in shopping, which is like the least interesting thing, that I’d have to like shopping malls and people that went to nail spars ... and that they would all be these. Sharp, even the Ang Mos, I thought they were all going to be these sharp young people that cared about all these things [appearance] that I’ve studiously not cared about all my life, that wouldn’t appreciate, you know the flat shoes and cardigan which is you know, my *modus operandi* apparently for just about everything (laughs) (Beth, 46, UK).³²

³² Ang Mo is a Chinese term that originates from Hokkien used to describe white people.

Beth is discussing how she doesn't respond in the UK to negative and normalising discourses regarding how to discipline her body as she can "shrug it off". Additionally, she suggests that she has "studiously not cared about [this] all my life", but was concerned of the impact that migration to Singapore would have for her indifference to dominant body discourses. Therefore, it is clear that indifference is spatially contingent and can change over time. In this instance, where Beth gave up her job to move to Singapore with her husband, I would argue that indifference is related to a person's sense of identity ("I know who I am there") and their confidence and feelings of self-worth. As such, in the case of Singapore where many of the expatriates I spoke to had left their jobs to 'follow' their husbands, notions of happiness and bodily satisfaction are linked to women's empowerment and identity.

A final aspect that I wish to discuss regarding this is the difference between indifference (which I felt with many of my participants) and active dismissal, of anti-fat discourses. I highlight how discussions regarding desires to lose weight are not always considered socially acceptable within popular feminist discourses. For example, when Beth states "I've studiously not cared about all my life", her use of "studiously" suggests that she is aware thinking about and caring about her body and appearance too much, could be considered to undermine feminist discourses regarding women's worth, and the mechanisms of power that have undermined women's empowerment.³³ Therefore, I would suggest that some of my participants' dismissal was not always due to indifference but through this conscious (and thus active) awareness. To be clear, I argue that there is a difference between not caring or feeling pressure to lose weight, and those that actively dismiss discourses that apply pressure to women to look a certain way. For example, it could be argued that Becky in chapter three (p. 97), is indifferent to body size discourses. However, I suggest that Beth's indifference is subtly different. I would argue that Beth can be seen to be actively engaged in *performing* ambivalence, both in awareness that caring about appearance could be perceived as vain, and that doing so undermines feminist movements to reject the objectification of women's bodies. This subtle change in difference is highlighted in the interview with Yvonne when she speaks to me and then to her daughter of 9 months:

People make lots of comments, especially about girls' appearances. People always ask you know, when you have a baby is it a girl or a boy? And if you say girl they

³³ Beth has a PhD within the social sciences and her apartment's study had many copies of feminist books. We enjoyed discussing feminist ideas together and she was fully informed of my political philosophy as a feminist.

say “*how pretty*” and if it’s a boy they say all kinds of different things. And if you say a girl it’s always “*how pretty*”.

[To her daughter] you’re a lot more than you’re looks aren’t you? (Yvonne, 35, USA)

Yvonne is a student and has a clear understanding of feminist discourses. Like Beth, I would suggest that rather than indifference, Yvonne is actively aware that gendered beauty discourses can have negative implications – particularly to her young daughter.³⁴ I argue that indifference is complex and can be performed in multiple ways that reflect how women engage and experience their bodies.

In discussing embodied experiences of body size I have highlighted the way that discourses and experiences matter (quite literally) to some people. However, this is not to say that these moments overshadow all other aspects of their lives, body size was not important to all the people I spoke with, and many had positive experiences. What is significant is the way that these experiences are flexible and spatially contingent. Migration for most of the women I spoke with amplified their sized embodied experiences and these are discussed at great length within many of the interviews. However, what is often not discussed by geographers is the significance of not caring, the politics of indifference.

4.8 Concluding remarks

The key focus of this chapter has been embodied experiences of size for expatriate women, through focusing on the everyday ways that body size and migration intersected within the context of Singapore. To be clear, in the previous chapter I focused on the discursive nature of fat embodiment through an analysis of different networks of power and how these are embodied and represented through expatriate migration, for example medical gaze, biopower, regulation and control. In this chapter, I examined the specific ways that everyday practices and places in Singapore contributed to embodied experiences – how the body was central to the women’s lives, focusing on the materiality of the lived experience. I have highlighted the spatially contingent nature of body size and the centrality of materiality and emotions to this. I argue that body size materially and discursively marks expatriate women’s bodies as outsiders, further deepening migrant experiences of difference in relation to people and places in

³⁴ Yvonne discussed for a long time her frustration at clothes shopping in Singapore but never commented on wishing to change her body or suggested feelings of dissatisfaction.

Singapore, and through intersections with other markers of embodied difference. In this chapter, I have specifically focused on some of the places and practices that contribute to the multiple ways that size and migration intersect, by foregrounding my arguments within the words of my participants. Embodied experiences of size are discussed in three ways: Clothes shopping, emotional size and resilience. I focus on these three points in turn.

Discussions of clothes shopping provided an accessible way through which to talk about body size without being intrusive or insensitive (Colls, 2004). I contend that for many of the women clothes shopping and specifically clothes sizing, highlights the material and discursive ways that women's bodies were marked as outsiders within Singapore. Inconsistencies in clothes sizing in relation to their home countries and the quantification of their bodies through sizing, contributed to negative experiences of their size and Singapore while further deepening their sense of being outsiders. I suggest that dominant gendered ideas regarding body size and the pressure placed on women to be thin meant that body size was often experienced negatively within the context of Singapore. A central focus of this chapter has implicated body size as emotional rather than quantifiable. Exploring Singapore as an active context I have focused on the different ways that size is emotional in relation to different places in Singapore, and how this shaped both their experiences of size and the places they visited. It is also temporal, and I have shown how many of the women's experiences changed over time where, *coming to terms* was a necessary aspect of migration. By doing so, I argue that academics should recognise the importance of size as emotional as opposed to just quantifiable, and how interactions with places, people and over time are embodied in multiple and different ways. Finally, so as not to homogenise all accounts of body size as negative or passive, I have explored methods of resilience. Particularly, how humour allowed women to challenge and deflect shame aimed at their bodies. In the last section, I discussed the politics of indifference as intently political but not overtly so. It has been my argument throughout that experiences of body size are central to those of migration, but additionally, discussions of embodied experiences hint, focus and get at other experiences of migration that have not necessarily been focused on by other geographical work in this area.

I have highlighted the importance of bringing together work on transnational migration with that of critical studies of body size. In so doing, I contribute to academic work in this area in three ways. Firstly, all of the discussions have highlighted the spatially contingent nature of body size and specifically how different places and

practices are integral to this, in this case through discussions in Singapore. This work is essential for progressing research within Fat Studies by highlighting the need to explore size from beyond Anglo-American contexts, identifying the cultural embeddedness of size and intersections of size to other markers of embodied difference, such as gender, ethnicity and class (Cooper, 2009; Cooper, 2010). Second, by exploring size as felt, I urge scholars working from quantitative approaches to recognise the potential that qualitative methods have to illuminating accounts of size, appreciating that numbers can only tell one part of the story (Colls, 2002; Hopkins, 2012). Finally, this chapter foregrounds gendered experiences of migration by focusing on body size. By doing so, I have highlighted how body size is an important axis of identity that both is intersectional and spatially contingent. I have noted above how through discussions of body size, many of the women identified other factors (such as race and ethnicity, sexuality and class) as important to experiences of migration. This chapter contributes to work on embodied transnationalism (Dunn, 2010), pushing the agenda to appreciate the multiple ways that body size is central to transnational experiences (Longhurst, 2005). In the following chapter I focus on this more overtly, drawing upon relational encounters, size, class, ethnicity and sexuality.

Chapter Five: Encountering Other Sized Bodies

5.1 Introduction

In our everyday lives we constantly position ourselves in relation to others.
(Valentine, 1999b, p. 51)

This chapter is about encounters. It is about encounters of similarity and difference and how these come to be embodied.³⁵ I focus here on the ways that in Singapore, encounters with others contribute to emotional, imagined and embodied constructions of body size and how this intersects with ethnicity, gender, class and sexuality. Primarily, it is about how encounters of embodied difference – specifically body size – contribute to imagined perceptions of difference, particularly through racialised and gendered narratives. Exploring difference – like ethnicity – through the lens of body size may seem like an odd way to think about how people experience and negotiate difference within global cities. For some it may seem trivial to propose such an approach, to acknowledge body size as a facet to which racial and gendered ideas come into being. However, as I argue throughout this chapter, by doing so geographers can begin to explore alternative and everyday ways that ethnicity and gender are understood, and how these differences (and similarities) are constructed through racialised ideas.

In the previous chapters, I have explored the discursive and embodied ways that body size is experienced. I have focused on discourses surrounding (anti)obesity, to the medicalisation of everyday life, from clothes shopping and emotional size, to resilience and humour. However, while there has been reference within the previous chapters, I have not yet focused on the significance of relational interactions. Throughout the interviews, and in many of the quotes already highlighted in chapters three and four, there were continued references to other, often Asian bodies. What was evident in many of these was the significance of other bodies to the women's own embodied experiences. As Valentine (1999b) suggests, in the quote above, we experience ourselves in relation to others. She suggests that we 'imagine the space of our bodies' (p. 57) through continued imagined 'connections with others' (p. 58). Crucially, the places within which these interactions occur are *as* significant as the bodies that are encountered. I argue that for the women I spoke with, encounters were shaped by postcolonial networks within Singapore, and as such are embedded within social,

³⁵ I choose to use similarity as opposed to sameness in recognition of the multiple and dynamic ways that identities are experienced not as the same but as similar to others (Harvey, 1992).

cultural and historical relations. In encountering others we imagine and experience ourselves differently and construct particular ways of understanding our identity and corporality that become embodied. Such ‘embodied relationality’ (Hopkins, 2012, p. 1232) is often made most noticeable through encounters with difference, for instance, when those around us are considered different or exist outside of (hetero)normative constructions of particular embodiments, e.g. fat bodies, non-white bodies or disabled bodies. This is inherently geographical. In the global city, or when people move transnationally, difference may be experienced or made sense of (and embodied) in new ways (Leonard, 2010a). It is the purpose of this chapter to explore these encounters, to see how relational sized experiences were significant to the expatriate women I spoke with, and connect this to postcolonial and critical work on race and ethnicity, and feminist work on gender and sexuality. Specifically, I do so by exploring these encounters within Singapore. In order to do so, this chapter is separated into two sections. First, I explore the literature on global cities as sites of embodied relational contact. Second, I analyse the interviews within the context of embodied relational experiences of difference. To do so I explore: sexualised proximities, essentialised difference, food and eating practices, and finally offer a critique of whiteness.

5.2 Transnationalism and the global city

Transnationalism captivates the geographic imagination. There appears to be something about the crossing of borders, the movement and migration of things, people and ideas, and way people live their lives across spaces, making connections in multiple and fluid ways, that fits well within traditional understandings of what geography is all about. Perhaps as Mitchell (1997, p. 101) suggests, it is a ‘sexy topic’ because ‘it embodies an inherently transgressive quality’, and as McEwan (2004, p. 500) extends, ‘geographical scholarship opens possibilities for harnessing the progressive and transgressive potential of transnationalism’. However, despite geographical attempts to explore transnationalism as enabling and challenging hegemonic bounded notions of nation, race, citizenship and sexuality, there are clear critiques of this analysis (see McEwan, 2004 for a review). Several writers (Mitchell, 1997; Pratt and Yeoh, 2003), have criticised geographical work of this nature, which has often over romanticised migration as an emancipatory process, and has ignored the multiple ways that migration contributes and reproduces geographies of exploitation, marginalisation and oppression. Indeed, in recent years it has been argued that abstracted macro-level focuses on transnationalism, for example from economic perspectives (Findlay *et al.*, 1996; Sklair,

2000; Beaverstock, 2002), have failed to account for the everyday practices of migrants (Conradson and Latham, 2005; Cook *et al.*, 2011; Ho and Hatfield, 2011). Instead, it is important to recognise the mundane, complex and multifaceted ways that transnational lives are shaped and lived in different places, at different times, and through the intersections of a plethora of axes of identity (Allon and Anderson, 2010; Conlon, 2011). As Yeoh and Willis (2005a) highlight, research that has focused on the transnational capitalist class (Sklair, 2000), has often painted them as hyper-mobile agents devoid of socially and culturally inscribed embodied markers, and has the ‘tendency to ignore their “co-presence”, with “others”, “in place”’ (Yeoh and Willis, 2005a, p. 270). In order to respond to this critique, research has focused on the importance of the intrinsically embodied nature of transnational migration. As Dunn (2010, p. 1) suggests, transnational work could:

draw attention to the embodied and emplaced nature of migrants, and the inherently inequitable access to mobility across various axes of embodied difference, including skin colour, disability, and gender. But while migration studies may have long been about the movement of bodies, it cannot be said that bodies have been a prominent spatial scale of analysis in the field.

Therefore, it is not enough to say that migration is inherently transgressive or progressive based purely on the assumption that boundary crossing is in some way liberatory. Instead, it is important to also consider the multiple and complex ways that everyday practices and spaces of migration contribute, reinforce and deepen transnational experiences of vulnerability, especially in relation to women’s migration, and also the ways that geographer’s analyses of these everyday gendered practices may then contribute to challenging them (Mitchell, 1997).

Within this research, I explore women’s transnational migration through a focus on everyday experiences within the global city of Singapore. As this chapter will show, I seek to respond to Dunn’s suggestion, through emphasis on embodied transnationalism above. By highlighting the ways that embodied difference – in particular, body size, ethnicity and gender – are experienced through relational interactions with others, I explore how this contributes to expatriate experiences of transnationalism in the global city. It is my argument that through migration and embodied interactions of difference, many of the women I spoke with experience their corporeality in different ways, while simultaneously constructing and narrating their understandings of difference with others (such as Singaporeans) through sized,

racialised and gendered discourses. For many migrants, the global city is a space of coming together and difference where many of the sites and spaces of the city act as 'contact zones' where these encounters take place. I discuss this further in the following section.

5.3 Global city contact zones

As a global city, Singapore provides multiple opportunities for difference to be encountered. Within the global city difference becomes proximate, and otherness materialises through social, temporal and spatial, relations and interactions. The global city is often recognised as a particular space within which 'social collisions' occur because, as Willis (2010, p. 139) suggests, spatial mobility enables different groups to come together. For social geographers, these encounters are important because they demonstrate how spaces are contested and negotiated, and how identities are formed through everyday encounters with others. As Willis (2010, quoting Keith and Pile, 1993) highlights, this is important if we are to challenge essentialist ideas regarding identities as fixed because it highlights the way that identities are formed through relational encounters of difference. Identities are 'always contingent and incomplete processes rather than determined outcomes' (Keith and Pile, 1993, p. 34 cited in Willis, 2010). For those that migrate, these encounters may be unsettling as they reinforce the understanding that they are the ones that are now *out of place* (Cresswell, 1996). This is what Ahmed (2000, p. 92) describes as a 'process of estrangement'. Moving to places that are not home is a 'process of estrangement, a process of becoming estranged from that which was inhabited as home' (*ibid*). For Ahmed (2000), becoming estranged from home is not just about the movement to a different place, and a dislocation from the spaces and places that were recognised as home. It is also about the estrangement that one feels from their own body. In becoming a stranger, migrants embody the knowledge that this is not their home (in relation to other bodies) and by sensing places (through the skin) differently. However, she is keen to state that migration is not only experienced through embodiment, but is historically and spatially contingent.

As a global city, Singapore provides the opportunity for 'meeting with the other' (Jacobs, 1996, p. 4). As Yeoh and Huang (2010) suggest, global cities are typified by the prevalence of contact zones. For example, in spaces of consumption such as hawker centres, shopping malls and on public transport (Bishop, 2011). In these places, relational interactions occur between locals and transnationals through 'both spatial

proximity as well as entanglements of race, class, gender and national identities' (p. 38). Pratt (1992, p. 6-7) defines contact zones as:

an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect... A "contact" perspective 'emphasises how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. [It stresses] copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power.

As Yeoh and Willis (2005a) suggest, by focusing on contact zones it is possible to explore transnationalism from an everyday perspective, to examine the way that similarity and difference are embodied. Instead of theorising expatriate migration through largely abstracted terms, exploring the city as a contact zone enables us to understand migrants – not as lone global citizens unaffected by the co-presence of others – but as situated within both global and local networks. Within this chapter, I focus on these interactions and spaces of contact in order to explore how these contributed to particular embodiments and narrations of similarity and difference. To clarify, by contact I mean both physical encounters (such as seeing, smelling, touching and hearing), and imagined ones (based on stereotypes, history and racialised discourses). However, I am cautious not to assume that the presence of others within the global city necessarily implies that a convivial relationship with one another exists (Amin, 2012), or indeed that contact should be presumed. The focus of this chapter is not to explore what Valentine (2008, p. 325) defines as 'meaningful contact', such as the potential for encounters to produce respect, neither is it to explore the opportunities for which difference and diversity to be overcome or reproduced through these encounters. Rather, I seek within this chapter, to explore the different ways that relational interactions contribute to transnational experiences of identity and difference and how these come to be embodied. As such, I focus much more on interactions that were narrated through discussions of body size, gender and ethnicity, and shaped through postcolonial (re)imaginings within Singapore.

5.4 Expatriate encounters in the postcolonial city

Within postcolonial contexts, transnational identities are not only constructed through present-day relational interactions, but are situated historically within networks of power that shape contemporary understandings of what it is to be a particular identity.

As Leonard (2010a, p. 128) argues, ‘a contact perspective’ (p. 128) recognises that identities are produced in relation to each other – for example, expatriates with locals, the built environment and different places. However, it is important to recognise that relational interactions are shaped through historical influences and asymmetrical power relations that are likely to situate expatriates as privileged. Within Singapore, what it is to be an expatriate – particularly a white expatriate – is rooted within its history of colonialism. As such, ‘constructions and performances of identity remain inextricably connected to structural processes of “othering”’ (Leonard, 2010c, p. 1249) in ways that may normalise racist, sexist and classist practices (Mills, 2005). Concurrently, as Leonard (2010c) suggests in her work, relational encounters can also be seen to provide the opportunity to challenge essentialist ideas, as people negotiate and develop their understandings through interactions with difference.

Within this chapter, I focus on how encounters of difference are embodied within the postcolonial city. However, as Hall (1996) suggests, it is important to acknowledge that postcolonialism should not be considered as a period of time within which colonial relations have ended and are no longer relevant. Instead, it ‘symbolises a movement of “deconstruction-reconstruction” of power relations, a temporal period that comes after formal decolonisation, but that demonstrates continuities with the colonial through reconfigured imperial relations’ (Fechter and Walsh, 2010, pp. 1201-1202). Within this chapter, I focus on how these relations still exist through analysing narratives of encounters (both real and imagined) between expatriates and locals, exploring how these contribute to constructions and performances of expatriate identities.³⁶ However, rather than focus only on encounters through the lens of postcolonial studies of ethnicity, it is important to explore the intersectionality of identities and how these relate to other different structures of power (Valentine, 2008). As such, critical work on expatriate migration has demonstrated the dynamic and fluid nature of identities within different spaces and within different relational interactions, and the importance of recognising the intersections of markers such as gender, class and nationality, and as I will demonstrate in this chapter – body size (Yeoh and Willis, 2005b; Fechter, 2010; Yeoh and Huang, 2010).

A postcolonial focus on encounters extends the potential to critique essentialist ideas of bodies as fixed and static entities. Instead, bodies can be seen as constituted

³⁶ Local is a contested term. Although local can refer to someone who is Singaporean, it was most often used in the interviews to define anyone who is not considered an expatriate or who is non-white, including migrant domestic workers.

through culturally inscribed practices; as embodying and (re)appropriating these through multiple and changing interactions with different people, places and cultures (Gremillion, 2005). Indeed, postcolonial work has contributed greatly to exploring studies of difference; to critiquing and challenging how othering practices are played out within global cities (Said, 1978). However, as Yeoh and Huang (2010, p. 38) demonstrate, within the global city it is not always the '*politics of difference*' but '*politics of proximities*' that shape encounters in the postcolonial city and the (re)production of discourses surrounding migrants. As they state:

proximities refer to both spatial proximity as well as entanglements of race, class, gender, and national identities. We argue that the anxieties that multiply in the contact zones of the city between "self" and "migrant other" do not only coalesce around lines that divide one group from the other, but are also heightened by notions of proximity, similarity, and substitutability, especially in the context of sexual relations and intimacies (Yeoh and Huang, 2010, p. 38).

Their work focuses on two migrant groups within Singapore (domestic workers and study mothers), who are often constructed as the 'dangerous sexual other' (p. 45) based upon proximity and difference. This work highlights the significance that relational interactions can have for the discursive construction of others. In addition, it emphasises the centrality of gender within the postcolonial city and women's contested access to public space. Ultimately, public spaces in cities are demarcated as masculine spaces in opposition to the feminine private spaces of the home. Transgressions by women are likely to have particular consequences for how they are seen – often as deviants (Yeoh *et al.*, 2000). However, this is not the same for all transnationals such as 'trailing-spouse' expatriates, due to their association and legitimisation as being linked to men. I would also argue that the intersections of race, class and nationality of expatriate women provide them with the freedom to engage in interactions in public spaces, not as deviants but as legitimate transnationals. This does not mean that these proximities are not important, but that they have significant implications for everyday embodied experiences.

As 'a child of diaspora' (Harper, 1997, p. 261), experiences within Singapore are marked by continuous encounters and proximities with others. It is often popularly referred to as a 'melting pot' for different cultures, as both long and short term migrants move in and around the city (*The Independent*, 2009, p. online). However, these encounters are not always well received. In recent years, in both mainstream and

academic literature, commentators have highlighted the problems of nation-building and forming unified (although multiple) cultural identities, while simultaneously and possibly paradoxically trying to foster a city and policies that value and attract foreign talent (Yeoh and Chang, 2001; *The Straits Times*, 2014). In recent years, there has been a proliferation of media attention focused on tensions regarding skilled migrants and concerns of preferential treatment, which has been seen to contribute to the alienation of Singaporean citizens. As Ho (2006) argues, these tensions between migration and nation are often viewed through the lens of Singapore's colonial past. It is therefore, more than just a case of negotiating and critiquing the rights afforded to individuals on the basis of class or role, but the intersections of class, race, history, identity and citizenship. As she suggests, within the global city, interactions between citizens and migrants and how identities are formed and (re)constructed, is not only based on how we see others, but how we see ourselves in relation to others, within the spatio-temporal relations of the global city (Ho, 2006). Within popular and academic discourse it is often recognised that expatriates exist within an 'expatriate bubble' – separated from real life, surrounded by luxury, artificiality and most importantly – safety (Hardill, 2004; Fechter, 2007). Within Singapore, the bubble metaphor is often used to reflect the colonial past and the separateness of Western expatriates from locals or other migrants.³⁷ Conversely, in Singapore, there are continuous opportunities and instances for expatriates to meet the stranger (Koefoed and Simonsen, 2011). As Walsh (2014, p. 238) explains, "'Life in an expatriate bubble', [is] a dialectic of encounter and segregation that shapes the texture of urban life experienced and reproduced by these skilled migrants'. Expatriate encounters in the postcolonial city are shaped both through exclusion and inclusion, similarity and difference and proximity and distance. In the following section, I explore how these relationships of difference contribute to embodied experiences of race and ethnicity, focusing particularly on whiteness.

5.5 Postcolonial embodiment

To a large extent, much of this chapter has focused on the fluid and relational nature of identities, recognising their spatially contingent nature. It is important to acknowledge, as Pratt and Hanson (1994, p. 9) do, 'the processes through which identities are created and fixed in place'. It is the purpose of this chapter, to challenge the notion of identities as essential by recognising the multiple ways that practices, histories and geographies

³⁷ Western expatriates are often used to define white migrants regardless of their nationality.

may *fix* certain identities in place, contributing to both the visibility and invisibility of certain markers (Reynolds, 2007). It has been suggested, that an exploration of embodiment provides a nuanced approach to recognising identities as both materially grounded, and as discursive, performative and socially constructed (Blunt, 1999; Shilling, 2003). Embodied identities are continually constructed in relation to the particular local histories of a place, and as such are always in a process of production in relation to specific contexts (Bonnett, 2000). Within postcolonial settings like Singapore, what it is to embody a particular identity marker such as whiteness, is (re)configured continuously through multiple asymmetrical power relations, of which the history of British colonial rule is a significant factor. Whereas whiteness has often been seen as a ‘fixed, ahistorical, aspatial, “thing”’ (Bonnett, 1996, p. 98), migration offers the possibility to explore how whiteness (and other identity markers) are far from essential or stable, but ‘remade, invented and inherited’ (Leonard, 2008, p. 48). For white expatriates, migration may result in them experiencing their identities in new ways in relation to the place of settlement, its history and the people around them. This is summarised by Leonard (2010) below:

When white people migrate, their race and ethnicity can take on new meanings. For some, race may become visibly significant for the first time; whilst others may be aware of more subtle shifts in the raced aspects of their lives, brought about as a result of their displacement to a new and different context. The extent to which race offers a useful or powerful resource through which to construct and perform identities in the new community will vary however, for whiteness is far from stable or predictable, interplaying critically with time and space. In postcolonial and settler contexts, whiteness (together with nationality and gender) will have a particular historically-based relationship to power, and an ongoing and dynamic connection will exist between this and more contemporary versions (Leonard, 2010a, p. 19).

From this it is possible to see the ways that migration usefully demonstrates the instability of whiteness as a racial category – it is contingent, historically grounded and relational. However, it is often only through relational interactions with others that it becomes visible and embodies particular meanings, often through the positioning of others at its margins (Jackson, 1998; McDowell, 2008a). In bringing to light the ways that whiteness comes to be experienced it is not my intention to cement it as a racial category. Instead, I seek to engage whiteness within discussions of migration in an

effort to recognise and situate it both politically and historically. As Bonnett (1996, p. 107) usefully suggests, '[a]nti-racists should not be complicit with the reification of "whiteness" but rather, working to critically illuminate its slippery and plural formations and expose its essentialism.'

In the years since critical studies of whiteness began (Dyer, 1988; Bonnett, 1990; Bonnett, 1996; Jackson, 1998), there has been a growth in work aimed at positioning whiteness within debates surrounding identity and migration (McDowell, 2008a; Leonard, 2010b). Much of this has responded to the need to explore whiteness as socially constructed and historically embedded. Postcolonialism has provided the conceptual framework from which to recognise the imperial legacies of colonialism (Said, 1978), by exploring whiteness as grounded within historical associations with people, places and cultures (Knowles, 2007). Whiteness must be recognised as the product of structural processes through which it is maintained and privileged through the repetition of social and material practices (Butler, 1988; Shome, 2000).

As Leonard (2010a) suggests above, migration can highlight the instability of whiteness as a racial category (Jacobson, 2001; Bonnett, 2004). However, this should not be confused with the optimistic assumption that those that migrate and experience their racial identity in a new way are more likely to challenge the dominance of race as a prevailing marker of social organisation, or recognise their whiteness as taken-for-granted. Instead, as Omi (2001) highlights, the economic, political and cultural structures of inequality (which are often deepened through migration), can cement understandings of difference along racial lines rather than challenge them. That is not to say that racialised differences are the most significant factors that shape how difference is constructed. Indeed, inequalities and difference are contingent and multiple, as othering practices are formed through multiple intersections of other markers of identity (McDowell, 2008b). As such, the experiences of different migrants are always based on both the intersections of their own markers of identity, and the historical, political and cultural contexts with which these coalesce. In the following section I focus on postcolonial sexuality exploring gendered encounters between expatriate women and Asian women, in order to explore other intersections through which difference is experienced and embodied.

5.6 Postcolonial sexuality

In the previous section, I briefly discussed the significance of the *politics of proximities* (Yeoh and Huang, 2010) to highlight the importance of gender within encounters in

postcolonial spaces. In their work, Yeoh and Huang (2010) discuss the sexualised moral discourses constructed in regard to two different groups of migrant women within Singapore. In particular, they highlight some of the sexualised anxieties that arise out of the proximities of different migrant women within different spaces. For example, in one section they focus on the relationship between female employers and migrant domestic workers, suggesting that for some women, anxieties exist with regard to sexual liaisons occurring between domestic workers and their husbands. They suggest that such concerns may arise out of the precarious positioning of women within the globalising city where women, and in particular, migrant domestic women, are marginalised both in public spaces, but also in the private spaces of their employer's home. It is clear that these anxieties are the product of intersections of different forms of discrimination and subordination that have solidified representations of some women as exotic *and* erotic others (Teo and Leong, 2006). While it can be broadly suggested that Asian women are seen as a threat on the basis of racialised discourses which mark them as 'exotic others', there are multiple factors at play. Set within the context of postcolonial relations, it is my argument that these encounters replicate traditional, patriarchal and historical relations between women and men, which position the women in opposition, rather than in solidarity with one another, through their association and subordination to men as both husbands and employers (Ware, 1992).

While work has explored the role of women from developing countries within global capitalism (Yeoh and Huang, 1999b; Yeoh *et al.*, 1999; Yeoh *et al.*, 2000; Willis, 2011), and studies have highlighted the significance of emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983; Huang and Yeoh, 2007; Dyer *et al.*, 2008), few have explored the extent to which privileged migrant women are implicated within transnational discourse. Instead, as Fechter (2010) highlights, much of the discourse that surrounds expatriate women involves negative stereotypes of the lazy, hedonistic and materialistic trailing spouse. While some studies do situate expatriate women's experiences within them, few have explicitly focused on the ways that relational encounters between women are significant to the construction of expatriate women's identities. As Fechter (2010) argues, by only accounting for particular migrant experiences (such as less privileged migrant women), rather than the wealth of transnational gendered views, we are limited in conceptualising who the postcolonial subjects are. In her study, Fechter (2010) argues that although there is a wealth of literature written on women in colonial settings, little has explored more contemporary versions i.e. expatriate women, their ideological value, and how they relate to global capitalism.

One aspect that is of particular importance here is Fechter's reflections on the relations between expatriate women and local women. She argues that contemporary tropes regarding white expatriate women as concerned about, and threatened by Asian women, can be traced back to colonial discourses, which identified colonial wives as 'sexually jealous' (Bulbeck, 1988, p. 238 cited in Fechter, 2010). She suggests that these stereotypes ignore the complexities of women's relationships to one another and changing colonial policies. Using the work of Bulbeck (1988), she highlights how some colonial administrations' decisions to bring wives to the colonies were done so as to ensure that the men did not 'go native', and thus jeopardise the success of the colony. As a result, the assumed jealousy of the women was often seen as an intended outcome, aimed at ensuring the separation of different races and social groups. As such, Fechter argues that the 'sexual jealousy of "foreign" women [that] remains an enduring issue' (p. 1288), can be linked back to historical structural processes aimed at doing just that. Clearly this is not the only reason why tensions may still linger, but it is an important acknowledgement of the legacies of colonialism and the patriarchal, capitalist and racist structures used to ensure the colonial success. The following extract has resonance with the focus of this chapter:

Such casual expressions hint at more profound, and sometimes disturbing, anxieties experienced by white expatriate women. These concern their own attractiveness as feminine and sexual beings, which is often seen as threatened or diminished by the presence of Asian – or specifically Indonesian – women around them. Expatriate women in Jakarta, for example, sometimes remarked with bitterness about being "too fat" to fit into clothes available at local shops. Informal conversations and those on internet forums more or less subtly revealed women's worries about their husbands' fidelity, as well as the perceived predatory nature of available Indonesian women, such as their secretaries or so-called "bar girls" (Fechter, 2010, p. 1288).

This is not to say that anxieties exist for all women, but it does highlight some of the structural processes that shape women's relationships with one another, and some of the dominant discourses that pervade expatriate discussions regarding local women. Fortunately, in Singapore women have multiple opportunities to engage with different women and to shape their own ideas regarding these interactions. However, as Fechter (2010) highlights, there is clear resonance between colonial discourses and contemporary versions of how different groups of women are viewed, which can be

maintained through gendered, racialised, classed and sexualised othering practices within the postcolonial city. Additionally, as the comments above highlight ('bitterness about being "too fat"' to fit into clothes available at local shops'), the materiality of bodies are also important, where the proximities of bodies can shape the ways through which difference is experienced and embodied (Allon and Anderson, 2010).

To a certain degree the anxieties and fears expatriate women may have regarding other Asian women can be seen to embody and construct Otherness through 'hegemonic masculine fears and fantasies about the feminine Other' (Hubbard, 1998, p. 57). In the postcolonial context, it is not just a matter of difference, but *Otherness*. Colonial racial and sexual discourses construct and fix difference as otherness through the repetition of stereotypical discourses (Bhabha, 1996). In particular, as Pyke and Johnson (2003) suggest, through the pervasiveness of stereotypes regarding Asian women as 'hyperfeminine: passive, weak, quiet, excessively submissive, slavishly dutiful, sexually exotic, and available for white men' (Pyke and Johnson, 2003, p. 36). These sexual and racial discourses have been used to justify the separation and opposition of the Western female self, from the oriental Other. Accordingly, unequal power structures polarise identities and reinforce binary relations between women, essentialising the dichotomy of Western/Asian (Bulbeck, 1998). However, as Hubbard (1998) argues, othering is not only through discursive constructions of difference, but is carefully produced through the visual as well. Many of the anxieties that arise from these (assumed) differences are a product of the intersections of dominant colonial discourses and the visual consumption of bodies and their performances of sexuality. As Kaplan (1997) argues, this places white women in a contradictory position where they are simultaneously and paradoxically both the subject of white male gaze and colluding with it, through their objectification and fetishization of Asian women. I argue that, anxiety is also performed and narrated through the embodiment of the white male gaze, and dominant discourses that discipline women's bodies to be thin in order to be considered sexually attractive. As such, I suggest that the women narrate their anxiety in multiple ways, for example through the positioning of their 'fat' bodies in opposition to the 'thin' bodies of Asian women.

Patriarchal and capitalist values can be seen to shape the way women view their own bodies, but also how they position themselves in relation to other women's bodies. As I have argued in the previous chapters, the thin ideal remains a disciplining discourse that shapes the way many women experience their body size. While clearly the impact of these discourses differs globally, it has been argued that the thin ideal can be seen to

be a growing standard in many places to which beauty and worth are valued (Dunkel *et al.*, 2010). While it is too simplistic to suggest that women are merely the passive subjects of a disciplining and objectifying male gaze, it is too optimistic to assume that all women are active agents, positioning their own happiness as the forefront of their decisions regarding their appearance and sexuality (Gill, 2008). As Gill (2007) highlights, contemporary sexualised discourses demonstrate a shift in the dynamic of power, from women as subjects of the male gaze, to a system of power in which this gaze is internalised. It is a:

representational shift to neoliberal subjectivities in which sexual objectification can be (re-)presented not as something done to women by some men, but as the freely chosen wish of active, confident, assertive female subjects (Gill, 2007, pp. 152-153).

These representations fit favourably within dominant neoliberal discourses of fatness as a personal choice, individual responsibility and moral failing. Women are taught that they are in charge of their own decisions regarding their bodies as sexually empowered agents, while simultaneously embodying and disciplining themselves in line with ideologies of the thin ideal.

At the same time, subjective identities are not constructed in isolation but are intersubjective. They are continually formed through a process of relational encounters with other people, bodies, and places and often require legitimisation from those around them. The growing prominence of thinness as *the* desirable mode of being (in many places), and the promotion of practices of self-care, contribute to dissatisfaction as the normative mode of being (Donaghue and Clemitshaw, 2012). Returning to Gill (2007), it is important to recognise that these (patriarchal and neoliberal) networks of power do not affect everyone equally, regimes of self-care and discipline unequivocally target women more than men. Indeed, it is possible to be an empowered active agent, as long as you are thin, attractive and working on a continual project of self-improvement.

5.7 Embodied relationality

So far, I have reviewed the literature on encounters from postcolonial and feminist perspectives. I have focused on global cities as contact zones for meeting with difference, and situated expatriates within this. Furthermore, I have engaged with critical perspectives on race, and in particular, whiteness as a way to situate postcolonial (white) expatriate encounters. Finally, uniting both feminist work on sexuality and

postcolonial studies of race, I have critiqued processes of othering within global city encounters, by bringing a body size perspective to shed light on some of the ways that encounters within the city are constructed, performed and narrated. It has been my argument throughout that bodies are constituted in relation to one-another. Additionally, they are always situated within the historical, gendered, classed, raced, cultural and politicised relations of that place. As such, 'bodies speak, without necessarily talking because they become coded with and as signs' (Perry *et al.*, 1997, p. 35). In the section that follows, I focus specifically on the ways that gender and race are experienced and performed through focusing on embodied and discursive constructions of body size. I do so to argue that body size is an important and essential marker to ways that people encounter similarity and difference.

The majority of the women I spoke with reflected that migration impacted upon the way they experienced their body size. By moving to a new place and through the everyday contact zones of the city, the women experienced their size in new ways or highlighted more explicitly their feelings towards their bodies. These transnational encounters had several implications: First, their embodied experience of size were (re)constructed in relation to other people's bodies. Second, their performances and narrations of body size were constructed through their experiences of displacement. Third, size was often mediated through multiple and changing intersections of their identities. While there is a large body of work concerned with how identities are shaped by relational encounters (see above), few have reflected on relational size. I focus in this chapter on embodied relationalities as Hopkins (2012, p. 1232) does:

[We are] constantly negotiating complex space–time embodied relationalities and intersectionalities. [Our] embodiment is fundamental to this set of processes as [our] navigations of space–time are shaped by varying intensities of relationality and intersectionality.

A central way that the women experienced their size was through reflections on relational encounters. In particular, these encounters often involved meeting with Asian or local women. A note on language before proceeding: I use the terms Asian and local here as my participants have done. However, I would suggest that these terms are used to represent an imagined homogenous Other, as opposed to a specific or regional identity. Thus, local does not necessarily denote a Singaporean national, but instead those who are visually marked as different and as such can be seen to include a range of women of Asian nationality. While it may not have been overtly stated, it was clear

from speaking with many of the women that they were often referring to women of Chinese descent.³⁸ At other times the assumed nationality (such as Malaysian) may have been stated, and at other times Asian, was used to discuss anyone the women assumed to be from the continent of Asia based on visual markers.³⁹ Often, the terms were used interchangeably when discussing Singaporeans and other migrant workers. In the following extracts, the use of these terms can be seen to reflect wider practices of othering, and the polarising of different groups based on visual markers and embodied cultural traits.

It was clear that migration shaped the ways that body size was experienced by many of the women. Significant to this was the importance of relational encounters, which varied widely through the intersection of different markers of identities, and within the context of postcolonial relations in Singapore. I return now to an extract from chapter four from my interview with Jessica, in order to summarise some of the key themes of this chapter. Jessica is 42 and originally from New Zealand, she has lived in Singapore for 15 years and considers herself different from many expatriates that live in Singapore, who are here only for a short time, and who she thinks segregate themselves from Singaporean life. Jessica works in Singapore and that was the reason she and her husband decided to move. She studied in Singapore when she was younger and wanted to return. In the following extract she discusses her experiences of moving around the city as a “plus size woman”:

Like if I am in Orchard Road and I’m walking around in Paragon,⁴⁰ right? I look terrible you see. Fat! Why? Because I’m much bigger, whereas if I was to go to Woodlands out near the American School, no one looks at me twice because it’s full of rather larger American women and because Woodlands is a sort of HDB kind of hub type place.⁴¹ There are a lot of very big Malay women and big Indian women (Jessica, 42, New Zealand).

In chapter four, I explored the intersections of body size, emotions and space in Singapore, reflecting on how Jessica embodied her sense of size in different places in the city. Returning to this extract again here, I engage a postcolonial perspective in order to focus on the way that body size is, firstly experienced in different places.

³⁸ There was often shared understanding between myself and the participant of who they were referring to.

³⁹ Visual markers were often used to identify where someone was from.

⁴⁰ A high-end shopping mall.

⁴¹ Housing and Development Board (HDB) housing are self-contained government housing units. In 2014 80% of Singaporeans lived in HDB flats (HDB.gov, 2014).

Second, as constructed in relation to other people. Despite the fact that the materiality of Jessica's body size and shape does not change as she moves around the city from day-to-day, how she feels about it does. Jessica feels "terrible" and "Fat!" in Orchard Road. However, she is less aware of her fatness – and as she insinuates happier – in Woodlands because she is surrounded by other women she considers fat. Thirdly, Jessica highlights the ways that nationality and class intersect within this.

Throughout the interview Jessica speaks at length about her feelings towards other expatriate women. Much of these discussions feed into some of the stereotypes that surround expatriate women, as discussed by Fechter (2010) previously in this chapter (p. 156). The following extract contextualises the points Jessica makes and highlights some of her feelings towards expatriate culture:

This is Fantasy Island for a lot of these women right. They've never had so much money in their lives and it gives them a sense of power because in some ways they're disenfranchised because their only power is in Mummyville. I think that's one of the really big problems of expat life, and in Singapore in particular. [...]. You travel with the same set of people if you're in certain industries [...]. You're with the same people, you live in the same condos in Orchard, so your only experience of Singapore is Orchard Road, the condos on Orchard Road, the schools [...]. They don't have any dialogue with Singapore. Like most of my friends don't have one Singaporean friend (Jessica, 42, New Zealand).

When Jessica discusses the spatially contingent nature of her sized identity, she highlights the significance of the intersections of space, relationality, class and nationality. Most importantly, is the way that she embodies and experiences her size relationally, being "much bigger". I highlighted previously that Jessica feels most comfortable surrounded by other "very big" people. However, it is not just a case of the size of people that she is around but the type of place. Orchard Road is considered to be a very expatriate dominated area, and Paragon in particular, hosts a range of expensive and luxury stores. Conversely, Woodlands, in the North of Singapore is a suburban area known for its greater population of Malaysians, as it connects Singapore to Malaysia. When Jessica states that it is a "HDB kind of hub type place", she contrasts expatriate areas to more local ones within which she believes she will not be judged for being fat. From her lengthy discussion of expatriate women throughout, it is clear that Jessica believes that in the "Fantasy Island" of expatriate Singapore, many women who have "sold their soul to the temple of the raw food café" (later in interview) will judge her for

being fat. For Jessica, it is clearly not so much an issue of experiencing her body as white in relation to other bodies, but of class and lifestyle. Her experience of fatness intersects with her inherent awareness of a judging white male gaze from other expatriate women in Orchard Road, unlike Woodlands where “no one looks at me twice”.

The extract from Jessica most overtly highlights the spatially contingent nature of body size. However, it is too simplistic to suggest that the variations in how Jessica feels are purely situated in contemporary relations. Instead, it is my argument that colonial relations and urban planning have shaped and continue to shape contemporary experiences of Singapore. Orchard Road is located in the hub of Singapore, west of the Central Business District (CBD). Within the original plans of Singapore from 1822 (figure 5.1), certain areas of Singapore were separated into *Kampongs*⁴². These Kampongs were designated on the basis of race and overseen by a captain. Much of the planning of these areas still remains today, as does the ethnic groups of people that live there. For example China Town, Serangoon Road and Kampung Glam are still dominated by Chinese, Indian and Malays respectively. European Town, which stretched from the east of the river to Tanglin, and was reserved for white colonial Europeans, is still populated largely by expatriates today. Orchard Road is not identified on the map below but is situated just north of Singapore Hill leading to Tanglin (Perry *et al.*, 1997).

⁴² Malay for village or community

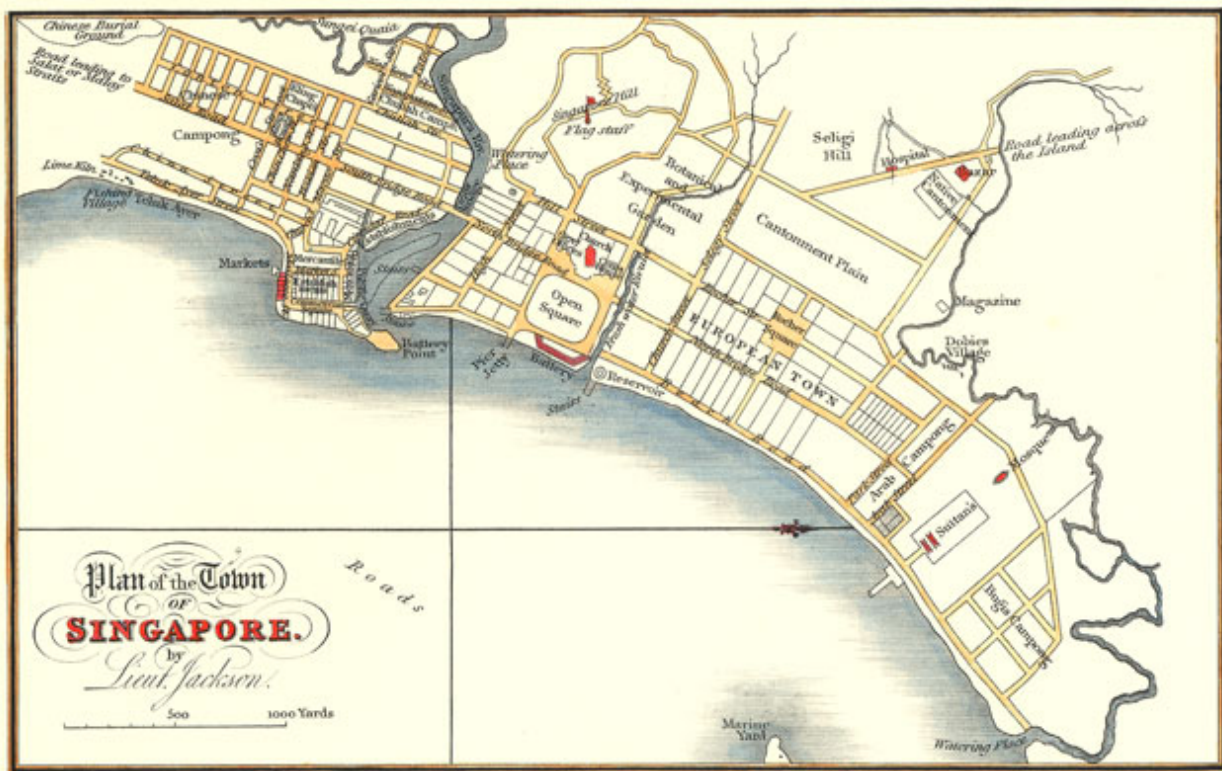


Figure 5.1: Plan of the town of Singapore in 1822 (Jackson, 1822)

While Woodlands mainly consisted of small villages and farms in 1822, due to its proximity and connections to Malaysia it was, and remains to be, largely populated by Malays. Lying on the north coast of Singapore closest to Malaysia away from the CBD, Woodlands is considered a Heartland area (see note page 101). Jessica observes that Woodlands is populated by Malay and Indian women as opposed to more central areas that are populated by wealthy expatriates. Although she is a white expatriate, Jessica stated earlier in the interview that “I’m deemed as a Singaporean and the others [white expatriates] are the enemy”. It is clear that her experiences of feeling more comfortable in Woodlands and “terrible” in Orchard Road are a product, not only of the size of the women in those areas – but the history, class and ethnicity of those areas that shape her embodied experiences of them. Thus, Jessica feels more comfortable in Woodlands (even though there are fewer white people there), both in relation to being among other larger women, but also her conscious embodied awareness that in Orchard she may be the subject of expatriate women’s gaze, which she considers to be negative

and judgemental. It is clear however, like many of the women I spoke with, that Jessica embodies her size in relation to others and in this instance through the intersections of class, ethnicity and body size. To be clear, the comments by Jessica above highlight the multiple ways that body size is experienced in different places of the city, but also how this is shaped by relational encounters. Ethnicity and body size are both important here. Jessica feels more comfortable surrounded by people that are “bigger” like her, as opposed to feeling a sense of connection on the basis of being white. Ethnicity and body size had clear implication within the discussions I had with many other women but differed to those of Jessica. I discuss these further in the following section.

5.8 Relational size and racial discourse

The first extract from Jessica highlights the main argument of this chapter – that body size is relational. However, her experiences differ largely from the majority of expatriate women I spoke with, who felt more comfortable surrounded by other (white) expatriate women, and often related their experiences of size through racialised discussions of body size.⁴³ The extract by Jessica most overtly emphasises the spatially contingent nature of size. However, the following extract suggests the ways that women embodied their size relationally through migration to Singapore, and the processes of othering produced through this. The following is taken from a focus group I conducted with members of an expatriate organisation.⁴⁴ In this extract they discuss how moving to Singapore impacted how they felt about their bodies:

- Jenny: And I just wondered why you had joined [group name]?
- Pat: The locals are so slim, it just hits you, you don't notice it in the UK.⁴⁵
You just see them here, they're stick thin.
- Gail: You go into a shop and you have to get an XXL it's just a bit depressing.
- Jenny: I wouldn't mind if they sent it the other way, everyone else was an XXS, that's fine. I just don't want to be an XXL.
- Everyone: [Laughing]
- Elizabeth: I just felt that when I got here that my husband would never look at me again. Because, what with all these gorgeous girls why would he look

⁴³ White is placed in brackets here as not all expatriates identified as being white but it was often assumed that the women identify white people as being expatriates.

⁴⁴ While the focus of the group was not overtly on losing weight the main ethos of the group and its members was that of weight loss.

⁴⁵ Local is used throughout by the women but it clear that they are speaking mostly about women of Chinese descent and specifically non-white women, see chapter one.

at *me*? I mean what was there to look at? I was the fat, I felt so frumpy and fat. Oh God.

Jenny: I think it's like, yeah, and also people dress up a lot more here.

Pat: Well they dress up to go to work don't they? They think they're going to a disco. Oh you don't have discos anymore – *nightclub*.

Everyone: [Laughing]

Pat: They go to work in things like they're going to a nightclub or a wedding.

Gail: Lacy things.

Elizabeth: And you can't buy clothes can you because it's all designed for them not for us?

Everyone: [agreement].

Elizabeth: The taste is completely different.

Pat: It's terrible.

(Focus group: Pat, 54, England; Gail, 50, Scotland; Elizabeth, 60, England)

There are a number of things that are of note here that are a result of relational interactions within Singapore. First, the women wish to lose weight as a direct result of feeling fatter than “the locals”. Second, they position the women in opposition to them through sexualised narratives and stereotypes. Thirdly, discussions regarding their own experiences of size are narrated through racialised discourses of (non-white) local women as Other. I will focus on each point in turn.

The motive many of the women had for joining the group and wanting to lose weight is discussed as a direct result of moving to Singapore and the size of the locals. Although they never explicitly state the nationality of the people they are referring to, it is inferred throughout the discussion, and my understanding from multiple conversations like this, that they mean women of Chinese descent, as opposed to South Asian or Malaysian women (as Jessica suggested). Again, local does not necessarily indicate Singaporean nationality, rather an imagined idea of Asian women as thin and short in stature. It is clear that they are discussing women as opposed to local men and that comparisons are only drawn between themselves and other women. I have discussed at length in chapter four how clothes sizing and shopping in general was often embodied negatively by the women. I return now to this to explore how clothes sizing was central to the way women experienced their size as relational. I focus here on the role of sizing in embodied *encounters*. From this discussion, it is clear that not only do

the women (myself included) find it frustrating that the clothes are too small for them, but that this contributes to an imagined understanding of the size of local women. It is clear that encounters with local women within the contact zones of the city have contributed to their understanding of them as “stick thin” and “slim”. Additionally, shops are contact zones within which women come into the presence of others, but also imagine the presence of others through the use of sizing. As a result, the women have decided to join what is ultimately a weight loss group in order to help them manage their embodied experiences in relation to local women.

All of the women in the focus group and almost every woman I spoke with reflected on the size of local women using a variety of adjectives to quantify size in relation to themselves. Pat suggests that the women are “stick thin”. Many of the other women that I spoke with referred to Asian women through a range of nicknames they had invented in relation to their size, for example: “Micro-Asian ladies” (Kirstie, 32, UK), “Stick insects” (Dawn, 54, England), and “Flat-packs” (Anne, 49, Scotland). While it is clear that many of the women seek to be thin themselves, and the reason that the members of the focus group gave for joining was to lose weight because the “locals are so slim”, I would argue that through the use of these terms they position “local” women paradoxically as both subjects of envy, and simultaneously subsume racial and gendered stereotypes that represent them as inferior and the subject of jokes. The use of these terms clearly represent the processes of othering which identify “local” or “Asian” women as passive others. Additionally, I would suggest that through doing so, expatriate women to some extent, are able to emotionally manage their relational experiences of body size. Clearly, there is a large impetus for women to lose weight within their home countries. However, it is my argument that for a variety of reasons, migration to Singapore and relational encounters with people of different ethnic origins, intensify the way that difference is marked on the body and played out through daily narrations and performances – within many cases, through the polarising trope of the skinny Asian woman.

Both Dawn and Anne declared that they had invented these nicknames and it is clear that these discussions are common fodder for expatriates living in Singapore. It is my assertion that these terms and observations highlight the dominance of globalising discourses of the thin ideal, but also the subtleties and disciplinary regimes that women must also not be *too* thin. Returning again to Fechter’s (2010) work, these comments hint at the ‘sexual jealousy of “foreign” women’ (p. 1288) which may arise out of the proximities of different body sizes. However, it is too simplistic to suggest that jealousy

is simply a result of expatriate women wishing to be thin. Instead, these terms highlight how relational encounters both shape how women see themselves, and also how persistent sexist and racial stereotypes perpetuate ideas regarding Asian women as sexual predators within the postcolonial global city. These insecurities are highlighted by Elizabeth when she states:

I just felt that when I got here that my husband would never look at me again. Because, what with all these gorgeous girls why would he look at me? I mean what was there to look at? I was the fat, I felt so frumpy and fat. Oh God (Elizabeth, 60, England).

While Elizabeth does not overtly suggest that the local women are sexual predators, she discusses her implicit assumption that her husband will no longer find her attractive. As I have argued earlier in chapter three, for many women, migration destabilised their sense of self and worth. The comment by Elizabeth can be seen to augment the understanding that a woman's primary role is as a sexual object, and feeds into expatriate narratives regarding husbands' infidelity (Yeoh and Huang, 2010). Through relational interactions, she embodies a sense of feeling "frumpy and fat". Despite not mentioning age, there is an underlying assumption that the women are referring to younger women than themselves ("Oh you don't have discos anymore").⁴⁶ Thus, feeling "frumpy and fat" can be recognised as a product of relational interactions and the intersections of class, age, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and body size within postcolonial relations that have historically, and continue to, position expatriates and local women in opposition.

Clearly there is a plethora of ways that expatriates and local women do interact with one-another and these are not always negative. However, the majority of people I spoke with reflected that they had no Singaporean friends and that they mainly socialised with other expatriates. Jane and Anita reflect on why they think this is the case in Singapore:

Anita: One of the mistakes expats make is that they just surround themselves by expats.

Jane: They like the security of other expats.

Anita: And then you do alienate yourself from the locals because they don't really want to know you because they think you don't want to know them. [...]

⁴⁶ This comment also highlights my own position as a younger woman.

You get attracted to people that you feel kind of you can connect to. It's a natural thing. We all do it. You gravitate to people you feel comfortable with, people that are similar to you.

[...]

Jenny: Do you socialise with any Singaporeans?

Anita: I don't really know *any*, yet.

(Anita, age undisclosed, UK, Jane, 43, Canada)

By socialising only with other expatriates and staying within what the participants called the “expat bubble”, many of the women I spoke with rarely engaged in meaningful contact with local Singaporeans (Valentine, 2008). As Anita and Jane highlight, and as Leigh discussed previously (p. 123), this is a result of wanting to be around people the women can connect with. Which, as Leigh suggests, is as much to do with class and ethnicity, as it is to do with body size. As such, how the women discussed, related to and imagined Singaporean women was often through the use of stereotypes and visual markers of difference. It is my argument that body size is a significant way through which racialised and gendered discourses of difference are played out. Thus difference is discussed, not overtly through racial narratives, but through ‘legitimate’ conversations regarding the body size of Singaporean women. In so doing, relational encounters cement the understanding that expatriate and local women are different. For example, that they have different tastes – that are “terrible” (Pat), and different bodies, “you can't buy clothes can you because it's all designed for them not for us” (Elizabeth). As such, body size acts as another way through which difference is embodied and asserted between different groups within Singapore; a result of both contemporary discourses regarding thinness, and historical colonial relations regarding expatriate and local women.

5.9 Sexualised proximities and relational otherness

It is clear from the discussion above between Elizabeth, Pat and Gail, that bodies play a significant role in the formation of boundaries of difference. As Yuval-Davis (1997) suggests, gender relations and sexuality are essential to the formation of nations. Women's bodies are often culturally and symbolically inscribed with meaning, and gender relations and sexuality are central to the ways that identity and difference are shaped by and within this (Pei-Chia, 2008). Within colonial contexts, Stoler (2002) argues that relations between coloniser and colonised, were cemented through sexual

control, based on racial and classed differences. Sexual jealousy between women was an outcome of racial anxiety and the reinforcement of otherness through discourses regarding sexuality. Within the discussion during the focus group, bodies were inscribed with meanings constructed through racial and classed differences. Thus, racial difference is recognised and embodied through discussions of the “stick thin” (Pat) Asian woman. Racial differences manifest themselves through sexual anxieties, and are reproduced through discussions of sexual attractiveness and embodied relational encounters with local women. It is my argument that certain discourses perpetuate and cement understandings of difference between different racial and classed groups using the language of sexuality and bodies. In particular, discussions can be seen to sexualise Asian women as the exotic and erotic other and impact upon how expatriate women embody their own sense of self and sexual attractiveness. Thus, the dominant discourse of the predatory Asian woman and the adulterous husband can be seen to reinforce the idea of difference between women, where body size acts as a proxy for racial differences. The degree to which these narratives played out often varied. Take for example the following two quotes:

Jenny Another aspect of my research is body image and ideas of how you experience your body image when you move to another country. From your expression I would say that you have maybe some ... [Louise laughing] opinions on that?

Louise: Well I would say that my biggest opinion about that, because I’m pretty comfortable with myself. There’s things I’d like to change – I’m 50 pounds overweight. You know those kinds of things. It’s made more obvious here only because everyone’s extremely tiny for the most parts. [In an older voice] Wearing very short skirts all the time. [Laughing].
(Louise, 42, USA)

They’re [Singaporean women] all very small and very slim. They all take a lot of care of themselves. They’re all into the shopping and their fashion and their style. I mean some of the women their outfits are fantastic. Everyone looks like a model, and it’s like oh my God. And it’s like some days I’m just like, I don’t *feel* like dressing up. Some days I feel like a giant on the MRT, it’s just because I’m tall
(Sophie, 35, UK).

The two extracts from interviews with Louise and Sophie do not explicitly suggest any anxieties regarding themselves and local women. However, they do subtly hint at the

significance that moving to Singapore has had for the ways they experience their bodies and identity. The first thing both Louise and Sophie state is that “they” and “everyone” are very slim. There is a mutual understanding between us that by this they mean Singaporean women. As such, they experience their own body size differently. Being “50 pounds overweight” is more “obvious” to Louise, while Sophie “feel[s] like a giant” sometimes because of her height. These are not necessarily negative experiences, Sophie discusses at length throughout the interview feeling happier in Singapore as she has lost weight – a result of being unemployed and having more time to go to the gym. However, they do also contribute to the fetishization of Asian women as exotic Other. When Louise states that the women are “wearing very short skirts all the time” she puts on an older voice, like a prudish woman. While she is joking, this does highlight how her experience of size is constructed in relation, both to other Asian women, and an inherent awareness of Asian women as highly sexualised. Again, although Sophie does not explicitly state it, it is clear that she experiences herself relationally and that she feels a certain amount of pressure to “dress up” even if she does not feel like it. Unlike the women in the focus group, Sophie appears to admire the way that the women she sees dress, but much of this conversation seems to perpetuate ideas regarding Asian women through gendered and sexualised discourses.

Within other interviews, women discussed sexual jealousy more overtly, highlighting the ways that racial, sexual and gendered discourses intersect within expatriate experiences, reinforcing otherness. Take for example, the following two discussions by Irene and then Sharon:

Jenny: As a single girl myself I would say Singapore is quite a hard place for being single.

Irene: Difficult and also, the way I see it, it may be racist I don’t know I may be wrong. The way I see this er, is I don’t know. Guys kind of have a thing for Asian girls and it doesn’t matter if they’re [the expatriate men] cute or not, the fact that they’re foreigners, the Asian girls tend to like it so it’s very easy for them to find a girl. And of course the type of girl you tend to find here tend to be more submissive, while European girls have more independence. They want to work, they want to, you know establish a life, a career.

(Irene, 25, Mexico)

Sharon: They call it the five Cs. Have you heard of it?

Jenny: No.

Sharon: The women here you have to have: cash, credit cards, a condo, a country club membership and a car. And if you don't have those five things they don't want to know them. I'm tarring them with the same brush here, but it's very common here. Five Cs. So you find a lot of these guys, cos a lot of these girls go out with the expats and the foreigners and all these bankers and whatever, I mean you see it all at Clark Quay and Boat Quay with these girls on their arms because they think they're loaded. [...] That also makes women insecure because they're seeing, they're worrying about their husbands going on business. They're worried about what's going on in the office and stuff like that. I don't worry about it personally because I'm confident in myself, that's why it's fine. [...]

Jenny: When you were doing your styling stuff do you think women wanted to because?

Sharon: Absolutely, absolutely, they wanted to be slimmer; they want to be thin because they feel fat living in Singapore.

(Sharon, 49, UK)

Throughout the interviews, two recurring stereotypes are highlighted: the passive, hypersexualised and predatory Asian woman, and the insecure, bitter and jealous expatriate wife. These discussions emphasise how essentialist and binary discourses are employed by expatriates in order to construct their sense of selves. Said's (1978) work on imaginative geographies provides a useful starting point for understanding the way that identity and difference is constructed within these conversations. In all of the extracts above, it is clear that the women employ particular portrayals of Asian women based on stereotypical and taken-for-granted cultural assumptions. In so doing, they reproduce particular representations of identity and difference through constructing binary divisions between 'us' and 'them'. As Coles and Walsh (2010) suggest in their work on British expatriates in Dubai, the imaginative geographies of the exotic 'orient' are fundamental to how Self and Other are constructed within the expatriate imagination. Through the repetition of discourses and through material practices, binary constructions are maintained and the separation of expatriates from locals is naturalised (Coles and Walsh, 2010). Many of the discussions above are based on stereotypical assumptions about Asian women based on historically situated, sexualised discourses regarding the orient. In addition, colonial practices have

also shaped the way that contemporary relations are formed, and the imagined geographies of Singapore and Singaporean women.

I focus here on imagined geographies, as I believe that many of the representations discussed here are situated within the discursive production of self and other, perpetuated by expatriate narratives of difference. However, this process of othering is clearly also manifested by visual and material interactions of seeing and looking at other Asian women. Rather than focus on the validity of these statements, it is clear that these narratives are particularly revealing of expatriate identities and how expatriate women negotiate their own experiences of otherness (Kothari, 2006). While Irene has awareness that she is employing particular racial stereotypes (“it may be racist”), she still appears to perpetuate the essentialist discourses of Asian women as “submissive” based on an imagined understanding of what Asian women want. Sharon is also aware that she may be “tarring them with the same brush”, but her experience of living in Singapore and seeing expatriate men with Asian women at “Clark Quay and Boat Quay”, appears to have consolidated her understanding of Asian women as only after the “five Cs”. In both extracts women are discussed as binary opposites. Irene considers European women to be “independent” and wanting to “establish a career” – traits she thinks are not attractive to expatriate men, and potentially the reason I may be finding it harder being single in Singapore.⁴⁷ Sharon perpetuates the common expatriate discourse regarding women’s fears about husbands having affairs with Asian women (defined by another participant, Gina, as getting “yellow fever”). Again, Asian women are discussed as superficial and materialistic. Ultimately, both extracts highlight men’s power within the relations between women. Women are positioned in opposition to each other, as competitors for expatriate men’s attention. It is clear that within the hierarchy of power, white men are the beneficiaries of these relations, whereas Asian men are never even discussed.

It is clear from these extracts that gendered and racialised narratives regarding Asian women construct them as an ever-present and proximate threat. The imagined assumption that they are predatory, combined with embodied (imagined) knowledge that they are thin and attractive, can be seen to contribute to discourses and narratives that construct them as Other. I would argue, that dominant globalising narratives of the thin ideal and anti-obesity discourses, intersect with these racial and gendered ideas, to

⁴⁷ Irene’s use of European here is interesting and highlights the problematic nature of these categories. While European is used here and Irene is Mexican she appears to consider herself as part of this group where European is synonymous with being non-Asian and being an expatriate.

discipline their bodies in order to be sexually attractive and ensure their husbands do not leave them. Sharon highlights above how many of the women she worked with as a stylist wanted to be thinner due to the pressures they felt in Singapore. These anxieties are highlighted further here by April:

A lot of people come here and they turn into *Tai Tais* for whatever reason [...]
With the expats I see certain things. I see a lot of women who are very afraid of losing their husbands and so they groom themselves and they make themselves as beautiful as possible because they don't want their husbands to go off with the alternative that is available [Asian women]. And also the flip of that which is my friends who are of Asian descent, not flip but racial flip, who are of Asian descent who are married to white husbands from, who are American and who are British, and then they come here you know they think "*well oh so he has an Asian fetish probably and that's why he has married me so he could easily go off with another Asian*" (April, 37, Hong Kong).

The extract suggests the pervasiveness of discourses of sexual jealousy and the emphasis on the care of the self, employed by women. All three discussions by Irene, Sharon and April assume that sexual attractiveness is the main priority of many expatriate women, and the only reason for men to be interested in them, as opposed to being "independent" and career-driven, as suggested by Irene. While these narratives have strong implications for the way that women are othered through sexual and racial discourses, it is clear that othering does not only occur between expatriate and Asian women.

Both Sharon and April are keen to distance themselves from other expatriate women. Sharon suggests that she does not feel these anxieties because she is "confident" in herself, and throughout the interview she argues that this is a result of having a career and a purpose in Singapore. April seems particularly judgemental of what she believes many expatriates become upon migrating, and is happy to distance herself from being a "*Tai Tai*". Her use of the Chinese term *Tai Tai* is interesting as it situates her in opposition to expatriate women, both through stereotypical assumptions that they are shallow and materialistic, and through her use of a Chinese colloquial term to do so. It was clear throughout the interview that April felt frustrated with the expatriate culture of shopping and lunching, and at the end of the interview she stated that her reason for wanting to speak with me was so that she could engage in "intelligent conversation". April appeared keen to show that she was not materialistic,

but also acutely aware that by not engaging in some practices of self-care she was excluded from certain expatriate activities. While both April and Sharon are happy to suggest that sexual jealous and anxiety is rife within Singapore, contributing to a need for women to take care of themselves or risk losing their husbands, neither consider themselves to be a part of this and instead focus on hearsay stories and imagined geographies. These extracts are only a few of the many discussions I had of a similar nature, where Asian women were continually intimated as exotic, erotic and predatory through orientalist discourses which positioned them as Other to expatriate women. I discuss these processes of othering further in the following section, focusing on everyday essentialised difference.

5.10 Everyday essentialised difference

In the section above I focused on how sexualised and racialised narratives of the exotic and erotic other were employed to cement boundaries between women and normalise difference. To be clear, it has been my argument that body size narratives provide a means through which to discuss differences legitimately, where difference is mapped onto bodies, not only through skin colour, but also size and shape. Thus, Asian women were continually constructed as Other, and were sexualised as such because they were seen to embody particular traits that are seen as desirable – for example slenderness – in relation to expatriate women. The language of body size thus acted as a means through which to speak about racial and cultural differences without needing to use the vocabulary of race. Thus, doing so in a more socially acceptable way. While it is often considered socially acceptable to speak about and assume differences based on one's size (such as being lazy), it is not often recognised as appropriate to discuss racial differences overtly. Body size narratives and differences act as a means with through to do so. In the following section, I focus on these racialised narratives more specifically in order to explore the racialisation of relational embodied encounters of difference. While I do not wish to suggest that these women are racist, it is my argument that everyday encounters of differences have contributed to the racialisation of difference and how they understand difference between themselves and Asian women. The literature on everyday racism acts as a useful starting point from which to think about how narratives of difference became racialised.

Essed (1991, p. 2) uses the idea of everyday racism to argue that:

Racism is more than structure and ideology. As a process it is routinely created and reinforced through everyday practices. [...] [It] connects structural forces of racism with routine situations in everyday life. It links ideological dimensions of racism with daily attitudes and interprets the reproductions of racism in terms of the experience of it in everyday life.

Racialised differences are reinforced through mundane and subtle practices daily (Eliasoph, 1999). Essed suggests, that these practices penetrate daily life and come to be seen as normal by the dominant group. As Beagan (2003) contends, the effects may seem trivial but can be seen to embed racialised ideas within dominant cultures, and sustain hierarchical relations of power and oppression ‘even in the context of formal commitment to equality’ (Beagan, 2003, p. 853).

In several of my interviews there is evidence that moving to Singapore had contributed to the racialisation of everyday life. The majority of the women I spoke with seemed aware that racist behaviour is not acceptable, and it would not have been acceptable to make racist comments to me – especially as I was recording the interviews. However, through processes of othering, discussions regarding body size can be seen as a way through which difference was sustained, particularly through racialised discussions regarding Asian women as other in their everyday talk. It is my aim to critically engage with these discourses of difference to highlight how migration contributed to the racialisation of their everyday lives, and how body size discussions legitimised this. Ultimately, I would argue that racialised discourses were perpetuated by many of the women through the uncritical use of body size discussions. I have shown above how sexual anxieties were narrated through discussions of relational experiences of size. In addition, many of the women I spoke with discussed relational sized encounters to conclude that biological differences *must* exist between Asian women and themselves (to explain their thinness). Take for example the following five extracts:

And like a friend of ours she is Chinese, she is always saying she has real trouble. She’s a fitness freak, but she has real trouble building muscle and if she stops exercising she will lose it in a second. And I think it must be completely different metabolism and body. They love their food here, like hawker centre food here is *not* healthy (Emily, 31, UK).

Gail: It amazes me how a small Asian girl can eat a great big – they do eat!

Sunita: But they don't put on weight, they eat like this much [signals with hands a large amount].

Elizabeth: I think they've got very good genes.

Everyone: Yes

Elizabeth: I reckon that their genes must be sort of different from ours. They *must* be!

(Gail, 50, Scotland, Sunita, 43, India, Elizabeth, 60, England)

Because you know, everyone thinks that when you come to Asia, because Asians are thin and they eat lots of rice, that Westerners think that they can come and eat lots of rice because it doesn't make you fat. But if you're a Western build and your metabolic typing is that of a Westerner. Instantly when you eat rice you're going to put weight on. Whereas Asians, their typing is different so of course they can digest it more than we can. They can't necessarily digest dairy whereas we can.

(Carly, 40, UK)

Irene: And its insane, I'm getting an extra-large sports bra and I'm not –that –busty. And it's really like, its extra-large and I got offended. Well not not really, but to get it. And I see them with their bra and their shorts and they're just very skinny and it annoys me so much.

Jenny: I think it's so hard here as well because there's so much food everywhere like we were saying.

Irene: I don't know how they do it. Genetics. They're just skinny.

(Irene, 25, Mexico)

It's in their genes. Genetically they're small people you know. Very much so.

(Cath, 45, Wales)

What is interesting here is that all five women use the language of genetics and biology in order to explain why they think Asian women are thin, and justify perceived differences between Asian women and expatriate women. As such, difference is grounded in biological essentialism through metaphors of difference. As Simpson (2000) suggests, the admission of genetic knowledge into everyday life and talk provides a new vocabulary through which difference can be rooted and racialised. Consequently, the metaphorical use of DNA and genetics provides an accessible means with which ethnicity is racialised through genetic essentialism, and communities are constructed through the binary oppositions of being genetically different. As Storrs

(1999) highlights, while situating difference through essentialism and biology is generally considered out-dated and problematic by social scientists, racial essentialism remains an enduring lens through which racial subjectivities are constructed by lay populations. Indeed, the metaphorical construction of being *in their genes* provides the means through which to ‘justifiably’ narrate ethnic stereotypical difference through biological assumptions (Tenenbaum and Davidman, 2007). It is not my aim to explore if there is a basis to these scientific assertions – if Asian people have different metabolic and genetic variations to Western populations. Instead, I focus on the way that difference is cemented through the co-option of the metaphor of genetics, grounded in biological essentialism.

The majority of the women I spoke with were happy to acknowledge that differences between Singaporeans and themselves were often the result of cultural differences, for example losing face and *Kiasu* (albeit often discussed in racialised ways).⁴⁸ However, differences in body size were often considered through the use of biological essentialism. It is my contention that this is the result of the medicalisation of everyday life, and that dominant popular discourses regarding fatness and obesity often employ medicalised and biological language. Therefore, lay populations are adept at employing medical narratives to discuss bodies. Instead of medical professionals being the only ones able to diagnose and label bodies, most people have access to vocabulary that pathologises certain bodies, through normative medical discourses within mainstream society (Murray, 2008).

Differences in size between expatriate women (regardless of ethnicity and nationality) were often justified through variations in lifestyle and diet. Whereas, differences in body size between expatriate women and Asian women often engaged the language of genetics. Therefore, while many of the women I spoke with reflected on other expatriate women as looking “immaculate” (Becky), and feeling “fat” in relation to them (Jessica), this was often assumed to be the result of them spending a large amount of time at the gym or on extreme diet regimes. Throughout many of the discussions I had, women were happy to distance themselves from other expatriate women based on the reproduction of stereotypical assumptions (such as being materialistic, vain, and ladies that lunch), but biological narratives were not usually employed. While many of the women I spoke with acknowledged that variations in diet

⁴⁸ Many of the women reflected that working practices differed in Singapore due to a culture where keeping and losing face were significant to interactions.

were a possible reason that Asian women are (perceived as) thinner, as we see in the extract by Carly, she still associates this with a different “metabolic typing”.

Again, relational encounters within the global city provide the opportunity for difference to be embodied and narrated. Body size discussions highlight the range of ways that othering practices take place, and the construction of self and other. However, while differences in body size *are* acknowledged between expatriate women, the differences in body size that exist between Asian women and expatriate women are seen to be the result of biological differences. As such, stereotypical differences are naturalised as biological. Conversely, differences between bodies that are considered to be expatriate (even if they are not from the same ethnic background), are thought to be a result of social practices such as exercising and dieting.

Many of the women I spoke with discussed the large amount of food that they perceived Asian women to eat, and as a result concluded that they must be genetically different. It is my argument that these discussions highlight the racialised discourses that cement ideas regarding difference, and the significance that embodiment has to these. It is clear from the five extracts above that none of the women are being overtly racist, and if anything many of them appear envious or just repeating a dominant idiom.⁴⁹ However, othering that occurs through the use of genetics and biology, highlight the fundamentally essentialist discourses that shape how difference was often understood within Singapore by some expatriates. Additionally, it highlights how medical narratives and discussions have entered into mainstream discourse providing the vocabulary into through difference is asserted. The accounts above highlight the way that difference was narrated, ultimately through both real and imagined encounters with others. Migration to Singapore meant that many of the women experienced contact regularly with Singaporeans and as such contributed to their own embodiments relationally. One such way that this was done, as we see above, was through discussions regarding food and eating. I explore this further in the following section.

5.11 Eating the other

Within the global city of Singapore, difference becomes proximate through encounters within contact zones. In particular, spaces of consumption such as shopping and eating, provide women with the opportunity to come into contact with others. I have highlighted above how clothes sizes and shopping contribute to embodied

⁴⁹ I am not suggesting that people can't be both racist and envious but that racism is complex and multifaceted.

understandings of the size of local women. I now turn to another contact zone where encounters of difference are experienced, that contributed to the imagined geographies of Singapore, and how difference was narrated within the interviews. In this section I explore narratives of food and eating.

Food is significant in shaping the way that we understand ourselves but also those around us. It is a 'a hugely powerful system of values, regulations and beliefs' (Probyn, 1999, p. 216). As Bell and Valentine (1997) suggest however, it is not just what we eat but *where* we eat. Through food and eating we are situated within multiple intersections and entanglements with place. Food contributes to our imagined geographies of place and how we embody it through the visceral and sensory experience of eating (Law, 2001). For migrants, food can take on new values, it has both real and metaphorical meanings, and can act as both a link to home and a path to constructing a new one (Longhurst *et al.*, 2008; Longhurst *et al.*, 2009). As Simmel argues (1994 cited in Probyn, 1999), food is paradoxically that which unites us – everyone has to eat – and simultaneously segregates us.

Within the global city context, food contributes to the embodiment of social difference (Longhurst *et al.*, 2008). While it can be argued that the consumption of 'ethnic' foods can unite different people in places through the enjoyable and pleasurable experience of eating, the racialisation and commodification of 'exotic' ethnic foods may do little to destabilise racial privilege (Cook and *et al.*, 2008). While used metaphorically, hooks' (1992) 'eating the other' highlights the problematic relationship that the consumption of ethnic food may have – reinforcing the privilege and power consumers have over what is defined as exotic and what is considered normal (Jackson, 1999). While food does provide the opportunity for hybrid and flexible identities, for many it can reinforce otherness. The 'taste of something more exotic' is both desirable and highly sanitised through commodity culture (May, 1996, p. 57). As such, as we eat the other through encounters of difference (and in this case most literally through food), therein lies the opportunity to both destabilise or cement understandings of what otherness is (hooks, 1992).

Within Singapore, food is recognised as a fundamental aspect of the construction of a national identity (Duffy and Ashley, 2011). As Koh (2010, p. 11) writes in the introduction to *There's no carrot in carrot cake* – a guide to hawker food in Singapore (that I purchased in Singapore so I could make sense of the exotic and often daunting foods on offer at my local hawker):

Singapore is a very young country. We have only existed as an independent country for 45 years. We are, therefore, still in the process of forging a nation. One of the commonalities which unite and bond us as one united people is our love for our unique hawker food or street food.

In a multiracial nation where different races are considered distinct and different, food has the power to unite those of different groups through hybrid cuisines and culinary mixing. As one Singaporean magazine suggested, ‘Singapore food is a kaleidoscope of our national identity’ (*Singapore*, 2014, p. online). Thus food and eating in Singapore – smelling, tasting, looking at – involves the coming together of difference and otherness. In Singapore, where it is common and cheap to eat out, places where food is sold, such as hawker markets, coffee shops and malls, are contact zones for encountering others, contributing to the multiple ways that difference is discussed and embodied. The importance of food is highlighted by Melissa (38, UK) who discusses the symbolic meaning of food in Singapore:

Food is the focus here. You know it has a lot of symbolic meaning for everything. And there is something completely wrong with you if you don’t engage with it on some level or another. And obviously I try to avoid it, and you know, not opt out but I tend to try and control my food a little bit more. Because I can’t do it [...] it was easier to lose weight in the UK (Melissa, 38, UK).

Melissa highlights two key reasons why food is important within Singapore. She overtly suggests that food has a “symbolic meaning” within Singapore. As Koh (2010) does above, she highlights the importance of food within the concept of national identity and culture. It is clear that for her food also encompasses another symbolic meaning – she attributes it to the control she has over her body and as having moral significance, such as failure and guilt.

It is clear from the discussion with Melissa that she has an ambiguous relationship with food in Singapore. On one hand, it clearly gives her pleasure and enjoyment through the sensual act of eating, yet on the other hand, the enjoyment of Singaporean food can be seen as burden as she must control her intake of food so as not to gain weight. When she states that it was easier to lose weight in the UK she explains that it is because food is readily available everywhere in Singapore and because the expatriate lifestyle promotes eating. Earlier in the conversation, Melissa commented that she was glad she was working so she “only has to worry about weekends”, when it is

presumably harder to control her intake of food. It is clear that for Melissa moving to Singapore and her relationship with food is complex. When she suggests in reference to other expatriates, “there is something completely wrong with you if you don’t engage with it on some level”, Melissa is discussing both the pleasure experienced when eating food, but also how engaging with Singaporean food is central to understanding and integrating within Singaporean culture. To not do so, as she suggests, would be to separate yourself from Singaporeans. For many of the women I spoke with, food was fundamental to how they discussed both body size and constructed others in relation to themselves. Many of these discussions highlight the production of self and other through narratives of encounters of food and eating.

In the section above I explored how several of the women suggested that Asian women may be genetically different from them. Many (including Emily and Sunita) concluded this based on assumptions that Asian food is both unhealthy (Emily), and that they eat a lot of food (Sunita). Food was often used as a means through which to other local people and a way that difference was encountered within Singapore. Take for example the following two extracts by Cassie and Claudia:

I just find a lot of the guys say Singapore food’s so great. Singapore food, I just don’t think it’s that fabulous because you see the restaurants and it will have a printed menu, one of those plastic ones. It looks like a chain store [...] and I’m thinking – that food’s so mass-produced and urch! And that’s the majority. You’d have to search hard to find one that’s not like that. [...] Someone I know she had some Chinese food here and one of them got really really sick and then they twigged that she’s allergic to MSG and there’s just so much MSG here in Singapore. I mean definitely it’s in there a lot (Cassie, 50, Australia).

Jenny: Do you eat at home mostly or do you eat out?

Claudia: Um, it’s so easy to eat out we were doing a lot of that but we just realised that for health’s sake it would be better to eat at home because then we know what’s going into it and what have you. Plus we have a helper which is fantastic and it’s nice to be able to say we would like such and such tonight and at 6pm it just magically appears on the table, it’s lovely.⁵⁰ It’s a luxury we don’t have in Australia. [...] Eating out you just don’t know what ingredients is being used in, and I know that

⁵⁰ Helper is a commonly used term for a live-in domestic worker (due to Singaporean legislation they must always be women)

Singapore is pretty much a hygienic place so it's not a huge concern but just simple reasons how much salt is going in, or whether it has MSG or not (Claudia, 33, Australia).

In many of the interviews and conversations I had in Singapore, food was an important topic of conversation. Not only because food was one of the ways that body size was discussed, but it also often embodied particular ideas regarding migration and moving to Asia. While many of the women I spoke with enjoyed the food in Singapore, many also reflected that they ate at home mostly because of concerns regarding the healthiness of food on offer. Several of the women reflected that eating at home was a choice they made once the 'holiday period' was over and allowed them to gain more control over their diets without being *tempted* by the unhealthy food on offer. The idea of Singaporean food being a temptation was often discussed with me, as were reflections on its assumed unhealthiness.

Like Cassie and Claudia, many of the women, myself included (p. 95), considered MSG to be the embodiment of all that is unhealthy. This is not surprising considering the large media and popular attention given to MSG. It is also often linked to being prevalent within Asian and particularly Chinese food.⁵¹ It is my argument that MSG acted as a means through which to other Asian food in opposition to Western food. For many of the women, MSG was seen to pollute the body and its consumption was to be avoided. Several reflected on how they were allergic and unable to eat it. Clearly, it is not the purpose of this research to assert whether this is true or not, however, what is interesting is how medicalised knowledge was utilised by the women to epitomise it to be harmful, unhealthy and bad. Simultaneously, hawker food and Singaporean food was also seen to be unhealthy and a temptation (like Asian women). As such, many of the women opted to cook their own food (or have their helper do so) so that they may control what substances were entering their food. While this may also be the case in their home countries, there seemed to be a general consensus that in Singapore it was more important to do so as the prevalence of undesirable foods was more of a threat. Subtly, Western medical knowledge and health practices can be seen to other Asian food as unhealthy and bad. This can also be seen within how health discourses were used to position Asian (women) as Other to expatriate women:

⁵¹ 'Chinese restaurant syndrome' defines, although problematically, a set of symptoms that may arise from eating MSG (MedlinePlus, 2004).

Susan: The diet here is particularly bad, because. It was easier to eat healthier back in London then it is here. Especially eating out because you don't know what you're eating. [...]

Jenny: It also scares me when it says 'no MSG'.

Susan: No *added* MSG. Which means there is already MSG in there [laughing].

Jenny: That means all the people that don't put the sign up [at hawker stalls] are adding it.

Susan: I can't eat MSG. I can feel it on my tongue the moment I eat it so I avoid hawker markets. [...] I did a feature on diet and we had a nutritionist examining reader's diets. So we would have these – which I loved – these really skinny Singaporeans would come it and be like “*well you know this is my diet*”. Oh my God it's like KFC! And then shush them in to be weighed all their body fat would be analysed and the nutritionist would say “*you've got skinny fat. You're skinny fat!*” And I was like YES! You and your little size 0 outfit; you're getting a heart attack. So they look really skinny, but they're actually, they've got really high cholesterol. Diabetes rates here are through the roof. Heart disease is through the roof, just because of the type of food they're eating.

(Susan, 40, Scotland)

Carly: It's very high in cholesterol, local hawker food. I recently was, sort of trying um, to lose weight – still am. I was seeing this guy who is, one of my customers, he is like a personal training guy. He was saying, people think that because it's stir-fried everything is quite healthy and that. But the oils and things they use. He said the thing is with Asians walking around, he said, their cholesterol is, if you weighed up between a Western person and an Asian their cholesterol is here [signals with hands much higher]. The cholesterol he said, it's really high in cholesterol, MSG he said it's really very very high in.

Jenny: Why did you decide that you wanted to lose weight?

Carly: Probably too much eating out [laughing]. Um, I don't know erm, probably one of those things you know that when you come to Asia everyone's skinny and everything. You see everyone's skinny and you think wow, you know, it's like. Almost it's a bit more, not that's it's not acceptable here to be [fat], because Westerners in general are a bit bigger than Asians. But yeah you know I always have these hang ups.

(Carly, 40, UK)

I also see a lot of these women from Asia that are. You know how everyone says that Asian women are really petite? And yes in some instances they are. But I call them doughy. They're very, they're not in shape, they might be tiny but they're nothing they're doughy and I see them and they're constantly stuffing their faces at the malls.

(Leigh, 43, Canada)

It is important to note that Susan is joking when she suggests her happiness at how unhealthy the women are. However, the conversation does highlight a key tension of how size was experienced in relation to Asian women, and as such many of the discussions do have a tendency to reflect a competitive relationship. As I have argued above, I would suggest that this is in relation to sexualised tensions regarding women and historical relations. Susan employs medicalised understandings of health to suggest that Singaporean food and hawker markets are unhealthy. Again, the discussions of our concerns regarding MSG highlight how we have embodied both Western medicalised knowledge and popular knowledge regarding food. Within expatriate narratives, migration to Singapore and the adoption of Western knowledge regarding food can be seen to polarise Asian food against food back home. Again, as with Claudia, Susan reflects that “you don't know what you're eating”, by this she means chemicals and additives rather than what the actual food is. It appears from the discussion that her assumption is that food in London is safe to eat, that she knows that they don't add chemicals and additives, whereas in Singapore you can never know.

Secondly, all of the extracts above perpetuate the stereotype of Asian women as thin. While not all of them state that they are discussing women, it is implied to me throughout. What is interesting here is how all of the women critique the dominant understanding that thinness equates to health. However, I would argue that they do so through racialised narratives and processes of othering, where Asian practices of eating are considered unhealthy. These critiques are not therefore deliberate, and I would suggest have little implication for challenging the women's own assumptions that fatness is unhealthy. This is explicitly expressed by Carly when she states that she is trying to lose weight, regardless of suggesting that Asian's (could be) both “skinny” and “unhealthy”. While it could be argued that many of the women wish to be thin regardless of health, health remains to be a guiding reason that many suggest as to why they wish to lose weight. Perhaps this is due to awareness that wishing to be thin is not always considered a worthwhile pursuit unless legitimatised by health narratives.

Knowledge that thinness may not equate to health could challenge the women's understandings regarding body size and health. However, instead these discussions instead appear to enable the women to position themselves hierarchically as better in terms of their knowledge of health and food practices. Thus food and discussions of eating in Singapore provide the vocabulary through which they again *legitimately* other Asian people. It is clear from the extracts that the contact zones where these encounters happen reinforce binary divisions when assumptions are made regarding the healthiness of food, and thus the health of those that consume it. This is clear in Leigh's judgemental suggestion that Asian women are "constantly stuffing their faces at the malls". It is clear that contact zones in the global city have allowed Leigh to witness others eating and thus make judgements regarding their bodies. The comments above highlight the problematic intersections of medicalised knowledge, (anti)obesity discourse and racialised narratives of the Other. It is my argument that food and eating practices provide a means through which to discuss the everyday mundane and embodied experiences of migration. From the extracts above it is possible to see how these discussions allowed women to talk about their embodied experiences of size through using health narratives and discourses. In so doing, it is clear that particular ideas regarding self/other, European/Asian, healthy/unhealthy, fat/thin and white/non-white. In the following section I focus finally on how encounters of difference were significant to experiences of ethnicity within Singapore.

5.12 Experiencing whiteness

In the sections above I have explored the ways that within Singapore contact zones enabled embodied experiences of difference. I have argued that certain practices regarding the body have been used to other people in relation to the expatriate women I spoke with. While much of this involved racialised and sexualised discourses, I have not yet spoken explicitly about how the women I spoke with experienced their ethnicity upon migration. In this final section, I will do so focusing in particular on whiteness. Although the women I spoke with defined themselves as belonging to a range of different ethnic groups, the majority described themselves as white or Caucasian and as such, I will focus on this (on the demographics form, see Appendix A).

Hall (1997, p. 345) suggests 'there is no identity that is without the dialogic relationship to the Other'. Within the postcolonial context of Singapore, whiteness could be seen to embody new meanings, particularly in relation to spaces marked as

predominately Asian. It is not my wish to reify it as a racial category, but instead explore the ways that it is socially constructed, historically grounded and produced through the intersections of other markers of difference. In particular, how relational encounters were significant to this. As suggested by Leonard (2010a,) above (page 153), migration meant that for many of the women they experienced their whiteness for the first time. However, rather than highlight the socially constructed nature of race as an identifying category, for many, migration appeared to cement ideas regarding difference along racial lines. I have already highlighted above several ways that racialised narratives contributed to othering practices. For many of the women migration to Singapore and the historical legacies of colonialism meant that social and material practices embedded particular ideas regarding whiteness as privileged. While many of the women were acutely aware and often uncomfortable by this newfound privilege, others appeared unaware and instead discussed racial differences in other ways.⁵²

The significance of migration for experiences of whiteness was most explicitly discussed (and analysed) by Beth. Her understanding of whiteness is informed by her own studies of postcolonial theory, and as such it is the most explicit and critical analysis offered to me:

Jenny: Going back to the, if you don't mind me asking about the body image thing here. How did you find it say coming from the UK to here?

Beth: In terms of body image?

Jenny: Yeah.

Beth: What aspect? How I feel about my body?

Jenny: How you feel about your body.

Beth: Yeah, [sigh] [pause]. There's so many aspects of that, I mean one of the first things is being white and so often being, standing out like a sore thumb. Certainly, unless you go into the centre where it's full of Ang Mos. If you're just around the edges, certainly the places I like to go you're surrounded all the time by people who are not white. Which is an interesting lesson to learn in life I think.

Jenny: Which sort of places do you go where you're not?

Beth: Well if you go round China Town round the wet market or around Little India. Um, yeah.

Jenny: How does that make you feel?

⁵² I use the term 'newfound' ironically as it is my argument that such privilege is not new but instead experienced more overtly for the first time through migration where racial difference may become more obvious.

Beth: Slightly anxious sometimes. Not so much now. I don't know.

Jenny: I think it's a difficult thing to put your finger on.

Beth: Yeah! It isn't just being white. It's everything you know that that represents. And the feeling that people could, in my imagination – it could just be in my mind, it probably maybe is – that they could justifiably resent your presence, your very existence [nervous laugh] because of the inequalities globally that are represented in my whiteness.

Jenny: What white embodies and what it means.

Beth: Exactly. Um. Yeah [pause]. I mean *you* know and *I* know it's much more complex than that. But that's the sort of visual, it's just a very heavy visual message isn't it?

(Beth, 46, UK)

In this extract, Beth neatly summarises some of the central aspects of how whiteness and difference were experienced within Singapore. Her own experience as an academic means that she does so by critiquing her own experience of being white and what she feels that represents. Clearly, Beth's academic background has provided her with the vocabulary and theory through which to do so, but many of these points were highlighted by the other women I spoke with. There are four key points that Beth highlights: First, she experiences her whiteness in relation to other (non-white) people. Second, these experiences are constructed in relation to other people and are spatially contingent, contributing to an imagined geography of Singapore. Third, she experiences her whiteness in relation to the history of British colonial rule. Finally, she is aware that whiteness marks her as privileged and considers that there may be tensions that arise from this.

Most of the women stated that they felt comfortable travelling around Singapore and often reflected that this was due to the fact that Singapore is a very safe place for women. Several stated that there was not anywhere they would not go, however many did highlight some places they felt uncomfortable. While it was not always overtly specified this could be understood as a product of being white. Take for example the following:

We can go up the road, there's a little estate up the road there's a little temple and it's an old estate, Queenstown being one of the oldest places in Singapore. So there's a lot of older people, older Chinese. Sometimes you go up there and you can hear "*Ang Mo Ang Mo*", looking at you and you don't feel that comfortable in places. Some of the old folk really don't like white people (Christina, 46, UK).

Not so much centrally, like around here [Orchard Road] there is a huge expat population. [...] But the more suburban areas you do feel as if you stick out a bit more, um [...] near Kembangan and that's very local Singapore. A couple of times I would go and meet him [her husband] for lunch round there and kind of felt a little bit out of place. We went shopping in Tiong Bahru and that felt the same, there weren't as many expats just locals and you just didn't feel like you belonged as much, but here around Orchard you feel just completely comfortable because there are so many expats here.

(Claudia, 33, Australia)

Well there is the appearance thing, everyone can tell I'm not from here wherever I go, I am not from here. It's interesting because there is hostility towards foreigners here. It's not really strong compared to other places but it's here. So sometimes I've had hostility.

(Megan, 34, USA)

These extracts differ from that of Beth because while it could be understood that the women feel marked as visually different (“the appearance thing”), they do not overtly state that this is due to being white in an otherwise Asian neighbourhood (apart from perhaps Christina). As such, despite embodying a sense of difference and experiencing othering, they are reluctant to acknowledge whiteness as a racial category among others, and its political and historical significance. Whiteness thus defies categorisation and remains unmarked. For several of the women I spoke with, living in Singapore was the first time they had lived outside their own country, or within an Asian society. Instead of migration helping them to acknowledge and critique their whiteness, few of the women were able to, and instead seemed to suggest that feeling “uncomfortable” was a product of the racism of Singaporeans. As Fechter (2005, p. 101) suggests, the women ‘refuse to see whiteness as anything other than the racial norm defending its naturalised dominance with the same strategies that they complain to being victim of’.

It is clear from the extracts that the discomfort that many of the women experience when they move outside of areas where “there are so many expats” (Claudia) comes from an awareness of being under the gaze of others. Thus, their whiteness is experienced in relation to other people seeing them, and in some instances (as with Christina), hearing the use of terms that mark them as racially different – e.g. *Ang Mo*. While Christina acknowledges herself as marked as white, she suggests that “old folk really don't like white people”. As Fechter argues (2005), rather than

acknowledge that her experiences may be similar to non-whites in her own country, she fails to recognise this and instead suggests that older Chinese people are racist. These instances provide the potential to recognise the in-stability of whiteness and how it is both socially and historically constructed. However, instead these occurrences appear to cement ideas of difference along racial lines. Additionally, it can be argued that rather than identify with whiteness as a racial category, many of the women choose to use expatriate as a synonym for white, rather than identify as such, perhaps out of awareness of what white may signify and the privilege that comes from this.

It is clear from the extracts above that expatriates often choose to socialise with and around other expatriates, as they feel more comfortable doing so. Therefore, areas in the CBD or close to the centre such as Orchard were marked as expatriate. Again, places on the outskirts, as Claudia and Christina highlight, are considered “Asian” and the women feel less comfortable being there. As I have highlighted above (map 5.1 p. 163), the historical urban planning to spaces within Singapore has significant implications to how different spaces of the city are marked, and who has a right to different areas. It is clear that today, this planning still has implications, where the women feel more comfortable within the colonial ‘European’ spaces, and less so in other ethnic areas such as Chinatown and Little India. Whiteness, thus takes on new meanings within encounters in the post-colonial city – it is spatially contingent and historically grounded.

A final aspect that was highlighted through discussions of encountering difference (and whiteness) was the right to space. The right to space intersected with several themes such as gender, race and ethnicity and body size. Take for example the following three extracts:

Jenny: So do you notice being a white person in Singapore?

Alba: Um, I don’t notice being white, for me the biggest difficulty I have is being tall and large, nothing fits. I don’t buy clothes in Singapore. I can’t buy shoes in Singapore, they don’t make shoes I’m a size 8, an English size 8. They don’t exist out here. [...] Little India is about the only place I don’t particularly feel comfortable. Geylang is the other one because we’ve got Geylang up here which is very. Cos I go up into Geylang because there is a great cake supply shop, um so I will often trek up there but you do feel conspicuous, you do feel conspicuous erm but and there are occasions when I think I don’t know whether it. Buses and things like that we are always on them the public transport and yes I think sometimes there is the

- sigh, *"you shouldn't be on here you can afford a taxi you should be in a taxi"*.

(Alba, 40, UK)

I've never felt uncomfortable I get stared at all the time because I've got this double buggy and then on top of the buggy I have this capsule so I can fit all 3 of them in there at once, so I'm just like a tourist attraction everywhere I go because I don't have a car and people are like *"why are you walking?"* or *"why aren't you in a taxi?"* or *"why aren't you driving your own car?"* And then they're all blonde so they're even more of a tourist attraction and people just – which I find a little invasive, which I'm getting use to now – they take photos of my children.

(Gemma, 30, Australia)

I kind of constantly have this conundrum of how I feel about Singapore. Part of me loves it part of me hates it. The roads drive me insane, [...] I was crossing Somerset the other day and I was trying to get over the road the light turned green [to walk]. There was a man parked in the middle of the road and I knocked on his window because he was on his mobile phone in the middle of a crossing with a green light. And I couldn't get the buggy past and I got like a torrent of abuse. I got called a fucking white bitch, a fucking whore and literally he was just screaming at me and I stopped and I turned round and said *"excuse me are you talking to me with a baby in front of me?"* And he was like *"fuck you you stupid fucking white bitch"*. And days like that I just think there is an undercurrent, it's all very lovely and glossy and everything else, but there is an undercurrent of life here which I struggle with hugely.

(Becky, 35, UK)

The extracts above highlight a few of the ways that difference, and I would argue whiteness, was experienced through claims to space. Interestingly, all three extracts involve incidents that occurred when the women were trying to navigate the city with their pushchairs. None of the women above had cars due to the high cost of having a car in Singapore, and as such opted to use public transport with their children. Again, in none of the extracts do the women attribute feeling "conspicuous" (Alba) as an aspect of their whiteness, although it is clearly relevant within Becky's anecdote.

What is interesting in the extract by Alba is that she denies feeling different because she is white and instead feels that she is more noticeable because of her size. I have argued throughout that body size is significant to how women experience

migration to Singapore. I have also argued that the intersections of identity are important, such as body size and ethnicity. Alba's references to feeling "conspicuous" in Little India and Geylang seem contradictory to her statement in response to my question. Again, it appears clear that Alba is reluctant to identify with whiteness as a racial category. Earlier in the interview Alba discussed an incident in which she received a backlash against her after complaining that she was rarely offered a seat on the bus when heavily pregnant. When she suggests that people "sigh" when she is on the bus this is in reference to this earlier discussion. Clearly, she feels her body is marked as different and privileged if she assumes people think she can afford taxis. As such, I would argue that Alba is aware of the historically and politically situated privilege that whiteness affords, but also reluctant to identify with whiteness as a racial category, as she feels less affiliated with other white expatriates. Feeling conspicuous and being uncomfortable with this can therefore be recognised as frustrating for Alba if she believes she is not as privileged as others may assume she is.

Again, the same sentiment appears in the discussion with Gemma and her right to public space. While Gemma does not express overtly that she and her children may be marked as different because they are white (and blonde), she assumes that others believe she must be financially able to afford a car with which to transport her three children around. Instead of acknowledging her whiteness she explains that she feels "like a tourist attraction", presumably as a response to feeling different. Instead she hints at what whiteness may mean – the ability to own a car. Like Alba, Gemma feels reluctant to identify as similar to other expatriates that she believes are living in an "expat bubble".

Finally, the extract by Becky highlights some of the racial tensions that exist within Singapore and I would argue women's rights to public space. Becky receives verbal abuse as the result of confronting a man as she tries to cross the road. However, again Becky does not reflect explicitly on her own experiences of whiteness in Singapore but instead the "undercurrent" of racial tensions she believes exists across all different groups in Singapore. Becky appears surprised ("are you saying that to me?") that she could be the subject of racial abuse because presumably she has fortunately never been so before. Again, while this incident is not nice, there is limited reflection that these are often the experiences of many non-white people in the UK. Clearly within Singapore, whiteness is not an essential category but informed through historical, social, cultural and political discourses that construct it as a privileged position which inform contemporary relations. While whiteness may take on new meanings through migration

and become unsettled it can also be reinforced and ignored through the systematic denial of it as a racial category. Migration, along with gender, sexuality, ethnicity and body size continually intersect with how contact zones in the city are experienced and as such identity formations are continually changing, ambivalent and contradictory. Experiences of whiteness and how it is narrated highlights just one of the many ways that difference is embodied through relational encounters within the city.

5.13 Concluding thoughts

It has been the purpose of this chapter to explore the plethora of ways that embodied relational experiences were significant to how expatriate women in Singapore narrate and construct encounters of difference. Focusing on the words and discussions of the women I spoke with, I have highlighted how encounters within the global city are significant to how difference is discussed and discourses are challenged or perpetuated. Central to this discussion has been the use of body size as a means through which to explore how encounters were talked about and how these intersected with other discussions of difference. Utilising feminist and postcolonial frameworks I have contributed to work that explores migration, gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity and critical work on body size. It has been my argument throughout that encounters of difference (both real and imagined) within the global city are central to how people embody their own sense of identity. Critically, I have highlighted how body size discussions have been utilised as a legitimate means through which to do so. Thus, racialised and sexualised narratives of difference have been subsumed within othering discourses that position Asian women as subservient and in opposition to expatriate women. Body size provides a way through which racialised and sexualised difference are played out within and across bodies in mundane and everyday ways. Body size acts as another way through which difference is embodied and asserted, through the use of visual and imagined encounters.

Throughout this chapter I have explored a range of ways that encounters of difference were discussed. Fundamentally I have done so to critique the binary constructions that many of the women discussed between themselves and Asian women (which I have highlighted throughout is a problematic category). To do so, I have recognised how Western discourses regarding thinness have been mobilised through historical colonial discourses of difference. First, I explored how sexualised proximities cemented dominant tropes regarding Asian women as a threat through the embodiment of white male gaze. Second, I focused on how difference became essentialised through

the use of biological discussions regarding body size and food. Third, I highlighted how food and eating practices provided a means through which difference was encountered. Finally, I sought to critique and challenge the absence of discussions of whiteness through recognising the way that racialised narratives were used by the women I spoke with.

I started this chapter by suggesting that body size may seem like a unique way in which to explore encounters of difference. While I have done so through the use of racialised and sexualised narratives, it has been my primary aim to highlight how body size acted as a proxy with which to other people and construct binary differences. It has not been my aim to suggest that expatriate women are racist. Instead, I seek to highlight the ways that migration and encounters contributed to the narration of difference. Thus, I have instead highlighted some of the subtle and nuanced ways that women speak about and experience difference daily. It is my argument that the dominance of globalising and homogenising discourses regarding body size and fatness, which position thinness as desirable, have implications on how women experience their corporeality in relation to others. Additionally, the prevalence of medicalised discourses provide people with an accessible vocabulary with which to discuss difference through medicalised and scientific discourses used to legitimise difference as biological. While exploring encounters of difference and orientalist practices through gendered and racialised discourses is not new, contextualising it within work on critical studies of body size is. In the following chapter I explore the contributions of this work.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

In this thesis I have explored the embodied experiences of expatriate women in Singapore. In bringing together the spatially contingent nature of expatriate migration, with embodied and emotional aspects of body size, I have introduced *trans-sizing* as an approach which unites both empirical and theoretical work in these areas. I have shown throughout, that focusing on body size experiences with women that have moved transnationally highlights the inherently spatial nature of body size, where migration contributes to the reconfiguration of how body size is experienced and how in-turn this shapes social and cultural interactions with people and places in the city. It has been my argument throughout that body size is (re)constructed in relation to different places and as such is discursive, material, emotional and relational. In addition, narrations of body size highlight the significance it has as a marker of identity, and as such is ripe for academic interrogation. The analysis provided throughout this thesis is the result of original empirical evidence collected through in-depth interviews with expatriate women in Singapore. Throughout the research process, I have sought to explore women's experiences of migration by valuing the words and stories they use to talk about their negotiations of the sized body. Fundamental to this was the need to ground experiences within the everyday, focusing on the gendered and embodied aspects of migration that macro-level economic accounts have at times failed to do, recognising the place for women's voices in migration research (Yeoh and Willis, 2005b; Fechter and Walsh, 2010). Additionally, in response to calls for greater cross-cultural and qualitative research within work on body size (Cooper, 2009; Wann, 2009; Colls and Evans, 2014), this project has been framed by inter-disciplinary work aimed at highlighting the multiple, ambivalent and nuanced ways that fatness is felt and lived. At the start of this thesis, I emphasised the necessity of starting with bodies as a spatial scale; bodies and embodiment have remained at all times central to this research and its analysis. I conclude, by providing an overview of the key arguments of this work and by demonstrating the ways that body size and embodied research provide important contributions to work both within and outside of geography.

6.2 Summary of thesis

I situate this thesis in the intersections of gendered work on transnational migration and critical studies of body size. In so doing, I place the body and body size as central to the geographical analysis of migration, highlighting the necessity of implicating space and place as fundamental to the construction and experiences of body size. To be clear, I have argued throughout that body size experiences shape narrations of migration. In particular, I have highlighted the ways that these narrations are constructed through gendered, medicalised, classed and racialised discourses that shape how women embody their own sense of identity and also how they imagine and construct ideas of difference between themselves and others. Furthermore, by positioning this thesis conceptually within critical work on body size I have sought to highlight the necessity of valuing the range of ways that body size is lived and experienced, and the implications of dominant (anti)obesity discourses to the everyday lives of women. In order to do so, this project has sought to answer the following three research questions:

- 1) In what ways does expatriate migration shape social and cultural experiences and narrations of body size and vice-versa?
- 2) To what extent do cross-cultural expatriate narrations of body size draw upon discourses regarding obesity, health and racial difference?
- 3) In what ways are body size discourses embodied through encounters with *others*?

By foregrounding the analysis within embodied experiences of size there has been clear overlap between the empirical chapters. All three chapters (three, four and five) connect in their focus on the embodied aspects of migration. For example, both chapters three and four highlight the centrality of consumption practices to their narrations of body size. In chapter five, embodiment provides the backdrop into which the analysis is approached, and as such draws upon experiences discussed in both chapters three and four. Furthermore, all three chapters are connected in their focus on everyday interactions in and around the city from the women's own perspectives. I have ensured that bodies remain the central scale with which to analyse experiences throughout, and as such all three empirical chapters connect in their focus on body size and embodiment. However, all three focus on different themes in representing the intersections of place to body size. In order to highlight the close relationship of theory to empirical data, each analysis chapter starts with a short literature review that highlights, not only the unique theme of each chapter, but also the wider contributions of them.

Chapter two, sets out the methodology used in this project and insights gleaned from the practical aspects of doing gendered research on body size. It begins by reviewing the theoretical contributions of feminist qualitative work and Fat Studies. In Part II, I discuss the practical aspects of the research, focusing specifically on the use of in-depth interviews as the primary method of data collection and also focus groups and the ethnographic self. In addition, I outline how the data was managed and analysed. In the final part of this chapter, I reflect on the research drawing upon my own thoughts on positionality and reflexivity and how this has shaped the project. The primary contribution of this chapter is to the gap in literature in Fat Studies and qualitative geographical research on the methodological and ethnical aspects of researching body size (Lloyd and Hopkins, 2015).

Chapter three focused upon the discursive construction of body size, and explores how dominant health discourses shape how the women narrated and constructed their experiences of size. In particular, it highlights the varying degrees that power (governmentality, biopower, medical gaze) penetrated their lives, emphasising both the importance of medical discourses to expatriate women, but also general trends in relation to the gendered nature of these discourses. Throughout this chapter it became clear that dominant medical and popular ideas regarding body size that perpetuate the idea of fatness as bad have significant implications to how the women experience their sense of selves and identity. For example, it was clear within the extracts that the majority of women had negative experiences of body size, and that they felt a large amount of pressure to lose weight or demonstrate a desire to. It became clear that migration often accentuated feelings of guilt, and that the expatriate lifestyle often made doing so harder. The unique focus of this chapter was the analysis of different regimes of power and how these were narrated, which I have done in three ways and explore further:

Firstly, using governmentality and biopower, I explored how many of the women internalised dominant ideas regarding body size and health, and in turn used this knowledge to discipline their own embodied practices through highly moralised discourses. I highlight how medical discourses have saturated different everyday spaces outside of the clinic, in particular, highlighting the importance of surveillance and gaze. I suggest that gaze is not experienced equally, but intersects with gendered, classed and racialised ideas regarding legitimate bodies, and as such women were often subjected to greater scrutiny and disciplinary regimes than men. Key to this was strategies of biopower, increasing and enabling them to survey and discipline their bodies, but also

the different ways that migration shaped and influenced how they thought about and disciplined their bodies. Secondly, I argued throughout that body size experiences are multiple and contradictory, and that women's sense of identity is often important to their ability to reject or be ambivalent to discourses regarding their bodies. For many, it was clear that migration contributed to a sense of losing their identity and as such a greater focus was placed on their need to discipline their bodies in certain ways, particularly in instances where they had left formal employment. Finally, I have been keen to highlight the varying degrees to which body size discourses were important, providing examples of women's agency and resistance, reflecting the multiple and contradictory ways that body size is lived and felt in different places.

In chapter four, I focused specifically on contextualising embodied experiences of migration by focusing on the everyday intersections of migration and body size in Singapore. While chapter three explored varying networks of power and how popular and medical discourses were narrated within the context of migration, in this chapter, I focused more clearly on how everyday practices and places shaped their embodied experiences of size and negotiations of body size discourses. To do so, I highlight both the discursive and material, to migrant experiences, by foregrounding my arguments in the words and feelings portrayed by the women I spoke with. By talking about clothes shopping, many women revealed to me the material and discursive ways their bodies were marked as outsiders. Specifically, the quantification of bodies through sizing and inconsistencies in international sizes, appeared to cement the idea that the women's bodies existed outside of the norm or those of the local population of women. This often had upsetting and negative consequences. In opposition to the quantification of bodies, I have highlighted throughout the way in which size is emotional and thus shapes and was shaped, by different places and spaces in the city. A central focus of chapter four was recognition of the temporal nature of size and how *coming to terms* with their size was often a necessary mechanism for dealing with the negative aspects of experiencing themselves as bigger. I suggest that the pressure placed on women to conform to standardised ideas regarding health and beauty (the thin ideal) result in upsetting experiences, and further deepen divides between women of different backgrounds. Again, as with the previous chapter, I was keen to highlight women's own agency and not position them as passive victims. To do so, I focused upon the use of humour and indifference as tools for challenging and deflecting experiences of shame and feelings of sadness. By focusing on the narratives, emotions and stories of the women I spoke with, I highlight the significance of body size as an axis of identity, which would enable

academics to get at the everyday complexities of body size and other intersections of identity.

In chapter five, I bring together many of the discussions in both chapters three and four by focusing specifically on the ways that relational body size experiences were discussed through encounters with difference. The key argument of this chapter is that discussions of body size provides a means through which to talk about and construct difference. Singapore, as a hub of mobility provides many places through which embodied difference is experienced, and as such discussions regarding body size and spaces of the city, are often talked about through racialised, classed and sexualised narratives. It was clear in many of the interviews that body size discussions enable women to discuss difference in what can be recognised, as more socially acceptable ways, than speaking overtly about difference in racial terms. However, many of the discussions highlighted the ways that difference in Singapore between expatriate and Asian women is often imagined and cemented through discourses based on colonial, sexual and racial ideas. By focusing specifically on body size narratives, I have highlighted the problematic nature of some encounters of difference in Singapore. In particular, I have suggested how body size acts as a proxy for racialised and sexualised discussions of difference. In so doing, I have been keen to explore difference through everyday encounters and the subtleties of these. It has been clear throughout, that dominant ideas regarding thinness as desirable have repercussions for how size is felt and experienced in relation to others. As I suggest here, through the reinforcement of otherness through racialised and sexualised narratives. Talking about the often-mundane aspects of body size and clothes shopping, provide particularly revealing and interesting narratives regarding difference, that may otherwise not have been discussed.

6.3 Contributions

The primary focus of this thesis has been to bring together feminist approaches to bodies, critical work on body size, and geographical studies of transnational migration. By uniting these three areas of work, I have developed a theoretical approach that highlights the importance of recognising, the intersections of embodied migration with that of the spatially contingent nature of body size. In this thesis, I introduce the concept of *trans-sizing* as both a theoretical, empirical and methodological approach. Scholars have shown the importance of embodied approaches in highlighting the subjective and partial nature of knowledge (Haraway, 1991). This work has contributed to theoretical and methodological advancements in both areas of transnational migration and body

size research. I have employed an embodied approach to migration throughout, in order to appreciate the multiple, complex and ambivalent ways that body size is felt and lived, through relational interactions in different social spaces. By doing so, this thesis echoes much work that places embodiment as central to it, in particular critical work on body size within Fat Studies, which emphasises the interrelations of size as an axis of identity with different social spaces. In order to do so, this thesis has progressed geographical work in this area by situating embodiments with a geographical focus on place, and what happens when bodies move over national borders. By trans-sizing, I have been keen to highlight the discursive and material aspects of sized identities, and how the relations that surround fatness and different borders are fundamental to how we experience place. Trans-sizing has enabled me to place bodies as central to different experiences of place and vice-versa.

Throughout this thesis, I have focused upon the stories and narratives of the emotions, practices and experiences of expatriate women living in Singapore. Broadly it has been the aim of this thesis to highlight the importance of a trans-sizing approach with empirically driven work on expatriate women's experiences in Singapore. In so doing, I respond to work calling for gendered studies of expatriate migration (Fechter and Walsh, 2012), greater cross-cultural contributions to work on body size (Cooper, 2009), and the need for expanding the body of work aimed at challenging dominant studies emerging from anti-obesity rhetoric (Colls and Evans, 2014). Overall, this work emanates from Longhurst's (2005, p. 247) assertion that we should 'write body size *geographically*'. The empirical work in this study highlights the multiple ways that body size intersects with varying social and cultural spaces. Focusing on the intimate and personal ways that women narrate their experiences of migration, I have taken embodiment and body size as the starting point through which to thread these narratives through theoretical work in this area. While bodies may be the starting point, the contributions of this work are not only restricted to work on bodies. I discuss now some of the three key contributions of this research.

6.3.1 *Trans-sizing*

The overall contribution of this thesis is the introduction of *trans-sizing* as a theoretical approach to work on bodies and transnationalism. While I will highlight in the following section the wider implications of a trans-sizing agenda beyond this project, the contributions of trans-sizing in this thesis are threefold. First, this project contributes

to work on transnational migration by accounting for embodied, emotional and relational aspects of migration to experiences of size. In focusing on bodies that move over borders, I have brought the moving body into focus. It has been the specific aim of this research to contribute to a growing body of work concerned with the everydayness of migration grounded in the subjectivity of embodiment (Blunt, 2007; Gorman-Murray, 2009; Longhurst *et al.*, 2009). In particular, I have focused upon women expatriate's experiences of migration, to highlight the necessity of valuing different people's experiences; both challenging macro-economic work on this, and attempting to rebalance the somewhat skewed focus in migration work that focusses primarily on women from developing countries (Silvey, 2004; Fechter, 2010). In chapter three, I traced the movement of medical knowledge from spaces of the clinic to everyday life. Using Foucault's notion of governmentality and biopower, I highlighted the ways that health discourses can be seen to shape people's experiences of body size, and the regulation and control that these discourses have in shaping different people's bodies. I have found that these perspectives provide helpful and important contributions to work on body size. By trans-sizing I have sought to explore the inherently spatial dimensions of these theories by recognising the power that certain discourses have in shaping people's lives as they move over international borders. Focusing on anti-obesity discourse, which is often recognised (although not unproblematically) as originating from the West (Murray, 2005), I have shown how body size discourses were utilised and shaped as many of the women I spoke with experienced their own corporeality and that of others when moving to Singapore. It was clear from many of the discussions, the power of body size discourses in framing how women see themselves and these narratives were intrinsically connected to their experiences of migration. In chapter three, Beth and Jane spoke explicitly about the ways that through migration they have lost a sense of their identity, and connected this to how they dealt with their experiences of size. It was clear through these discussions the gendered implications of body size and migration. In particular, it is important to recognise how the gendered nature of migration, and anti-fat rhetoric, target women's bodies. As Beth suggested, by losing her sense of identity (a product of not working), she felt limited in dealing with the emotional impacts of migration and how she experiences her body. For many expatriate women, loss of identity was embodied in different ways, but was often recognised as a product of no longer working or becoming legally a dependant in Singapore. By engaging a trans-sizing perspective the wealth and depth of different migrant

experiences were narrated, and it became clear that there is greater need for work that both theoretically and methodologically allows this.

6.3.2 *Fat studies*

Second, this thesis has been firmly rooted within work in Fat Studies. There is close relationship throughout between theoretical work in this area and the empirical data gleaned from the interviews. Academics within Fat Studies have highlighted the limits of work so far, suggesting that it has predominantly been from an Anglo-American perspective, with few cross-cultural studies (Cooper, 2010). One of the most significant contributions of this study has been the progression of critical work on body size from a transnational perspective, pushing the debate over borders. Singapore has provided the context through which embodied experiences have been analysed. I have highlighted throughout the entanglements of, social and cultural spaces, to lived experiences of size. While I recognise that many of the participants in this study have come from the UK and US, I believe that the transnational emphasis of this study highlights the necessity of recognising how difference is felt and lived through bodies and encounters of difference. In chapter four, Lauren and Christina discussed the ways that cultural differences in how people talk about bodies in Singapore affect them when moving (Isono *et al.*, 2009). In chapter five, postcolonial and feminist approaches guide the analysis highlighting the ways that difference is discussed and embodied using narratives of body size, that are shaped through racial, gendered and classed narratives. In particular, I suggested that body size is often used as a proxy for racial difference. In the context of Singapore, colonial relations and cultural differences are central to how women experience being expatriates, but also how they experience their size and feel their bodies represent their outsiderness. Accounting for, and hearing from, the experiences of people that move transnationally and from cross-cultural perspectives is fundamental in highlighting the spatially contingent nature of size. By doing so throughout this thesis, I challenge medicalised approaches to body size, suggesting that bodies are shaped by culture, and what it means to be a different size, can change in different places and at different times. By trans-sizing I hope to stimulate discussions in both Fat Studies and migration research, highlighting the centrality of place to body size from a critical perspective.

6.3.3 Identity

Finally, an important aspect of this research is highlighting body size as an axis of identity. It has been clear throughout the analysis chapters that body size, like a person's ethnicity, gender or class, is fundamental to shaping how people experience different places. I contend also, that in highlighting its contingent nature, body size is socially constructed, and as we have seen through migration, intersects and shapes how people experience themselves. In chapter four, Jessica reflected on how her whiteness intersected with fatness making her stand out, or fit-in in different places. For several of the women I spoke with, feeling older in relation to other women contributes to negative experiences of their size and insecurities regarding their relationships with their husbands. While body size has been at the forefront of the analysis here, I do not wish to suggest it is the most important facet of identities. Instead, by focusing on body size, I have been able to get at different aspects of migration and highlight the deeply intersectional nature of it. In writing body size geographically, I contribute to the growing area of work on body size from a critical perspective, by accounting for the ways that it is important to people and to how they live their lives. By putting bodies and their size as the central focus of this work, I seek to progress ideas regarding body size. I argue that body size is not trivial or shallow, but is fundamental to how people live their lives in relation to discourses that homogenise and discipline bodies to be thin. Indeed bodies and their size matter, and so too do the places they go.

6.4 Future research avenues

In utilising the concept of trans-sizing as outlined in this thesis there are ample opportunities to develop research further. As I have suggested earlier (Lloyd, 2013, pp. 126-127), 'A trans-sizing approach will ground studies of embodied transnationalism through a focus on body size and unpack the implications that multiple identities have in relation to body size such as race, gender, nationality and sexuality'. I propose now two further agendas for work. Firstly, my research contributes to the emerging interdisciplinary field of Fat Studies due to its critical perspective on fatness. Methodologically, by trans-sizing I have valued and appreciated the feelings and stories of the women I spoke with and given time and space to their experiences of size. Theoretically, trans-sizing has enabled me to remain critical of dominant medical discourses regarding fatness to theorise it as felt and spatial rather than quantifiable. Many of the women discussed difficulties with fitting into clothes and the built

environment, however, a significant focus of this research has been on discursive constructions of size and relational interpretations. During this research, I spoke to women of different sizes and shapes with some identifying as fat and others who could be defined as ‘normatively’ sized. I believe doing so, has allowed a nuanced approach to size, however, I also believe there is ample opportunity to speak to and value the words of women who identify specifically as fat or big. Doing so, would provide important insights into how the built environment and mobility are intrinsically linked to the materiality of bodies. Furthermore, while it is clear that women that are normatively sized can feel big and have upsetting experiences in relation to body size, researchers need to acknowledge the differences experienced by those that are materially much bigger, and as such do not gain social benefits afforded to those based on thin privilege (Donaghue and Clemitshaw, 2012). While I recognise that patriarchal and neoliberal structures apply pressure to women of all sizes to conform to standardised beauty ideals regarding the size of their bodies, researchers must pay attention to those that are stigmatised and discriminated about because of their larger size (Fikkan and Rothblum, 2012). I contend that a trans-sizing agenda would be useful in exploring the experiences of women that identify as experiencing discrimination because of their size and their experiences of mobility, be it over national borders or otherwise.

Second, I have been attentive throughout to give time to the stories of a particular group of migrants whose experiences are often overlooked. Doing so provides a fuller representation of migration by accounting for everyday aspects of privileged women’s lives. Chapter five, paid specific attention to how postcolonial discourses shaped sized experiences in the context of Singapore, and in particular the women’s experiences of Asian or Singaporean women. I have focused here specifically on women from different countries that predominately (although not exclusively) identify as white. A great deal of critical literature focuses on obesity epidemic discourse as a Western phenomenon (Boero, 2007a). While anthropologists have provided insights into different cultural meanings attributed to fatness globally, a large body of this work use disembodied, positivist approaches (Yoon *et al.*; Puoane *et al.*, 2002). I believe there is ample scope to explore fat subjectivity from a critical perspective. Indeed a trans-sizing agenda would allow for the ambiguity, fluidity and contingent nature of size in different social and cultural contexts. As I have suggested earlier (Lloyd, 2013), a trans-sizing perspective could helpfully contribute to understanding how obesity epidemic and Asian values discourses shape moralities and experiences of fatness in different places. Within Singapore, a trans-sizing approach could focus on Singaporean

experiences of size, and explore the intersections of different identities, in different places from outside an Anglo-American perspective. Valuing what fatness means to different people in Singapore and in the context of rapid economic expansion in the postcolonial city, would greatly enrich lived accounts of fatness to Fat Studies. In this research, I have focused specifically on the transnational migration of people and what happens when bodies move over (national) borders. I envisage a trans-sizing perspective will not be limited to just the movement of people but a whole host of ways that ideas, people, and things move over borders and how this shapes both our experiences of place, and our bodies.

Appendix A: Socio-demographic information of participants

Age	Time in Singapore	Moved from	Nationality	Ethnicity	Occupation
36	>1 year	UK	Portuguese	White	Teaching Fellow
53	1 year	Scotland	British	White	Admin Manager
40	8 years	UK	British	White	Sales Manager
35	16 months	UK	British	White	Housewife
57	18 months	UK	British	White	None
38	3.5 years	UK	British	White	Lecturer
35	17 months	UK	British	White	Homemaker
46	8.5 months	UK	British	White	"Dependent"
49	18 years	Bahrain	British	White	Floral Artist and Designer
54	2.5 years	England	British	White	Housewife
30	3 years	UK	British	White	Operating Director and Editor
45	6 months	England	British	White	Homemaker
43	2 months	Canada	Canadian	White	Teacher- currently unemployed
	1 year	UK	Hong Kong/British	Chinese	Retired Solicitor
	3 months	UK	British	Indian	None
45	18 months	Wales	British	White	Housewife/TA
30	6 years	Scotland	British	White	PR consultant in sport
50	2 years	Australia	Australian	White	Coach
40	9 years	Scotland	British	White	Freelance Journalist
28	22 months	Colombia	205 Colombian	Hispanic	Housewife

30	10.5 months	Mexico	Mexican	Latin	Freelance
49	4 years	Scotland	British	White	Wine taster
28	2.5years	India	Indian	Indian	Managing Consultant
35	5 years	Canada	Canadian	White	Healthcare Product Manager
42	15 years	New Zealand	New Zealand/Ireland	White	Counsellor
38	5 years	Peru	American	Hispanic	Makeup Artist
46	10 years	UK	UK	White	Housewife
40	3 years 10 months	UK	British	White	Homemaker
35	11 months	U.s	American	White	Homemaker
33	8 months	Australia	Australian	Greek	Mum :)
41	4 years	UK	British	Irish	Homemaker
36	8 months	UK	Bulgarian	White	I.T
37	7 years	Hong Kong	USA	Indian	Zumba Teacher
34	1 year 3months	USA	American	White	Housewife
25	5.5 years	Mexico	Mexican	Latin	Housewife
36	4 months	Australia	Australian	White	Mum (oh-no hate that)
32	6 weeks	UK	British	White	Nurse
38	4 months	Australia	Australian	Filipino	Stay at home mum
		Indonesia/USA	Indonesian/us	Indonesian	Stay at home mum
31	1 year 1 month	UK	British	White	Housewife

40	24 years	Australia	Australian	White	Director
36	12 months	UK	British	White	Mum/free-lance Editor
43	1 year and counting	Canada	Canadian	White	Writer/Blogger
42	4 months	USA	American	White	Housewife (aaah!) ⁵³
37	9 months	USA	American	Korean	Home
30	12 months	Australia	Australian	White	Home duties
43	10	India	Indian	Indian	Part-time Teaching
50	4.5	Scotland	British	White	
60	4.5	England	British	White	Retired
54	2.5	England	British	White	Housewife

⁵³ All comments are those made by the participants.

Appendix B: Personal information form



A study of female transnationals within Singapore

Personal Information

A vital aspect of this research involves conversations about women's experiences of living in Singapore. All of the information you will provide will be kept confidential and will not be shared with anyone else.

Please feel free to leave blank any questions you would prefer not to answer.

Name: _____

Age: _____

Time in Singapore: _____

Country of Origin: _____

Location in Singapore: _____

Nationality: _____

Ethnicity: _____

Current occupation: _____

Previous occupation before moving to Singapore: _____

Marital status: _____

Sexuality: _____

Number of dependants: _____

Religion: _____

Appendix C: Interview schedule

Interview schedule

Thank you for agreeing to take part- clarify confidentiality and anonymity, show them how to use the Dictaphone and give it to them. I am hoping to use these interviews to better understand the everyday experiences of British expatriates in Singapore.

Introduction- General Information

1. To start off I was wondering if I could ask you some questions about your reasons to move to Singapore and your daily life here?
(How long have they lived there, where do they live etc. etc.)
2. So first of all, why did you move to Singapore, what were the reasons for the move? (Explore issues about reasons for move, feelings and thoughts before and after moving and why. Discuss thoughts and fears about moving, family, work etc.).
3. Do you have a job in Singapore?
(Explore issues about what they do, if it is different to the UK, how they feel about their work, their daily routine and if it has changed)
4. If not employed?
(Were they employed before? How do they feel about this? What do they do differently, has their routine changed?)
5. Can you tell me a little about your initial experiences when you moved to Singapore?
(What were your concerns about moving? How was your social life- hobbies etc. Experiences of moving with family or leaving family. Differences in terms of the weather, cultural differences etc.
6. Can you tell me a little about what you usually get up to in an average day?
(Where they go, don't go, socialise with who, places etc.)

Transnational experiences

7. I am interested in finding out about how expatriate women feel about moving to Singapore and their everyday experiences. As Singapore is quite different to the UK would you be able to tell me about any thoughts on being a foreigner in Singapore?
(Explore issues of cultural differences and food, employment etc.).
8. Do you think it is different for women in Singapore than in the UK?
(Explore issues regarding safety and crime- public space, sexism, government and local attitudes, employment, family life/being a mother/other women, body size- feelings and thoughts).
9. Do you think that beauty and body image is different in Singapore?

(explore issues of how, why, how this makes them feel)

10. Something I am interested in is how expat women experience their body image in Singapore. I have especially noticed that I feel huge compare to Asian women, how have you found it being an expat in Singapore?
11. I have found it quite hard adapting to the food and knowing what to eat (anecdote about fainting/mrt), how do you feel about the food, where do you usually eat?
12. Do you notice a difference in how you feel about your body in Singapore than in the UK?
(explore these issues further, what things do they notice, when do they notice differences)
13. You mentioned that you feel (insert feeling), is there anywhere that you notice this difference more?
(Talk about where they feel different and why. What times of day, places, in relation to other people, how they feel about this, any places they don't go or things they don't do anymore).
14. Are there any places that you feel particularly conscious of your body?
(Where, why? Do you avoid them?)

Consumption

So we were talking before about your experiences of body size in Singapore and the differences here. I was wondering if you could talk to me a little about your experiences of shopping further?

15. How often do you go clothes shopping?
(How do they feel about it, enjoy it, why/why not, how do they get there, where do they go. Who they go with)
16. Do you think you shop differently in Singapore?
(Do they wear different things? Shop in different places? How do they feel about this? Have you had any problems? The climate weather, experiences of shopping assistants)
(If prompted, explore in-depth any ideas about Singaporean attitudes to body size- shop assistants, government, body size).

17. What about hairdressing etc.?
(has your image changed, clothes/hairstyles/tanning etc.)
18. What about shopping for food has that changed?
(discuss in detail, eating out and buying food, do they mostly go out, how do they feel about this, what sort of food do they eat, who cooks etc. get them to think about their relationship to food).
19. Do you think the food you eat is different?

(how they feel about this- possible link to dieting or other people)

(If mentioned discuss weight loss/gain further)

20. You mentioned that you had lost/gained weight since moving? Are you happy to talk about this a little further?
(explore if they have, why they have and how they feel about this)
21. Are there any places that you notice your size to be an issue or are particularly self-conscious?
(Discuss if there are places they won't go, why, when)
22. Do you think this changes your behaviour then in the UK?
(Discuss eating, clothes shopping, work and fitness, diets etc.)
23. Overall how would you say you feel about your body in Singapore?
(relationships, diets, clothes etc.).

Thoughts and feelings

Thank you for speaking to me, finally I wondered if you would be comfortable sharing some of your thoughts about migration to Singapore?

24. How do you feel about your time in Singapore?
(people they socialise with and places they go- places they avoid in Singapore and why)
25. Do you have any memories that stand out as particularly good or bad?
26. Are there any occasions you have felt particularly happy/homesick in Singapore?
(explore where and when, how they respond to these experiences)
27. How long do you plan on staying here?

Thank for taking part, confidentiality etc. Anyone else they know.

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